

Copyright  
by  
Benjamin E Snyder  
2011

**The Thesis Committee for Benjamin E Snyder  
Certifies that this is the approved version of the following thesis:**

**Crafting Socially Engaged Theater**

**APPROVED BY  
SUPERVISING COMMITTEE:**

**Supervisor:**

---

Suzan Zeder

---

Steven Dietz

---

Kirk Lynn

**Crafting Socially Engaged Theater**

**by**

**Benjamin E Snyder, BFA**

**Thesis**

Presented to the Faculty of the Graduate School of

The University of Texas at Austin

in Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements

for the Degree of

**Master of Fine Arts**

**The University of Texas at Austin**

**May, 2011**

## **Abstract**

### **Crafting Socially Engaged Theater**

Benjamin E Snyder, MFA

The University of Texas at Austin, 2011

Supervisor: Suzan Zeder

In this thesis I examine the craft goals and strategies I have employed in developing three socially engaged plays during my studies in the MFA Playwriting Program at The University of Texas at Austin. I am defining “socially engaged theater” as that which is written for the stage and explores a major social issue. Each play included examines a different issue. The play, *You Ain’t Cuz You Not*, explores the issue of gentrification, privilege, and poverty. The script is written in a non-linear, non-naturalistic style to meet both the craft needs and resonate most effectively with the issues. The play, *Rivers of January*, looks at racial construction and class divisions in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil. The play is structured in a conventional and linear format and is stylistically entirely a naturalistic drama to create the tone most effective for exploring the themes. The play, *You Can’t Win*, is a musical biography of the career criminal Jack Black and study of the prison industrial complex. Each script presented a unique set of craft challenges in the development process. The tone, genre, and structure of each piece were determined by both the needs of the particular story and the desired outcome of examining a particular topic of social relevance.

## Table of Contents

Thesis Essay .....	1
you ain't cuz you not .....	29
Rivers of January .....	82
You Can't Win .....	162

In examining the body of work I have created during my time in the MFA Playwriting Program at the University of Texas at Austin, I feel compelled to reflect on what first drew me to the theater and what has kept me here. As a playwright my core belief is that theater is a tool for social change. The plays included in this document, *You Ain't Cuz You Not*, *Rivers of January*, and *You Can't Win*, are all examples of this. Before discussing these plays, it would be useful to contextualize them in my larger journey in theater, the process by which I was politicized as an artist, as well as the theatrical models I have looked to along the way for guidance.

For as long as I can remember I have read the world through a lens of race politics. Perhaps it was a result of growing up in a multi-racial family in the Bay Area, or my time spent as the only white member of an Afro-Brazilian youth performance ensemble in the late 1980s, or my early obsession with hip hop culture throughout the 1990s; all my endeavors as a storyteller have in some way been an examination of the intersection of race and class in America. In high school I joined the Conservatory Theater Ensemble (CTE), a student-run theater company where I began writing my first plays. I scrapped a lot of my first scripts, as I wasn't so keen on revising. The determining factor for me in whether I saw a project through to fruition or not was if I could grab onto a larger idea. If I could convince myself that somehow the play mattered to me, to my community, to the world, then I would be sure to complete it. I started a script about my mother's back problems. I scrapped it after the first draft. The play I

wrote about a racially motivated fight at a high school party went through many drafts and I ended up directing it in CTE's annual one-act festival.

I have always felt a great responsibility to engage with the issues of the world in my stories. There needed to be something above and beyond the entertainment value for a story to be worth telling. One of my first plays was titled *You Can't Write a Play About Racism Without Using the N-Word*. The play follows three generations of white liberals navigating race relations in their lives and community. The first scene involves two elderly couples having dinner and discussing how one of them was recently trapped in an elevator with a Black man. The second scene looks at two sets of parents at a high school football game discussing the merits of their school's new and first Black football coach. The final scene is a group of teenagers in a band figuring out how to recruit a Black student to join their band and possibly dance on stage while they play. It was my own critique of the more covert racial prejudices that inhabit white, liberal, suburban America. It was angry, didactic, but in the end, a catalyst for some much needed conversations amongst the student body and faculty on white privilege and racial stereotypes.

My first encounter with socially engaged theater came by way of a VHS tape. HBO had filmed *Mambo Mouth* by John Leguizamo and I attended a screening of the film for high school students. The show is a series of monologues from a wide variety of Latino New Yorkers. One character is a young man who just had sex for the first time and struggles to express how he wished it had been more intimate. Another is a transvestite sex-worker giving profound advice to a woman in an abusive relationship.

This solo-show was a real game changer for me. It was really funny and it dealt with heavy issues in an organic, character centered approach. There were no long-winded speeches about a social ill. Instead there were characters interacting with their environment and struggling to overcome real, tangible obstacles. As a model, this show really opened my eyes to a whole new approach. Above and beyond that, it was cool. It captured the voices and flavor of the city in all the best ways. It had an aggressive swagger that left you afraid to take your eyes off the stage. I set out to find more shows like it. For a number of years, the only similar pieces of theater I could find were other solo-performers. The 1990s was a renaissance for solo-performance. I became acquainted with the work of Eric Bogosian, Whoopi Goldberg, Danny Hoch, Rhodessa Jones, and Anna Deavere Smith. It seemed to me at the time, that the only theater that tackled real issues with seamless storytelling was coming from the one-man or one-woman shows. I watched and studied. But where did this leave me? I was not a solo-performer. I write plays, preferably for ensembles. My next breakthrough came in the summer of 1999.

During my first few years living in New York City I did my best to see as much theater as I could, or at least be aware of what was out there. Every week or so I'd dip into a Barnes and Noble Bookstore and skim the theater section to find the magazine *Time Out New York*. I'd look over the current week's issue and make notes if anything jumped out at me. In the magazine, a star by a show meant it came highly recommended. That summer there was one show with consistent stars, playing at a small, relatively unknown, black box theater in Chelsea. It was extremely rare for an Off-Off Broadway



show to receive such high ratings. I felt the need to support. The show was *In Arabia We'd All Be Kings* by Stephen Adly Guirgis. The play, set in the Hell's Kitchen neighborhood of New York City, is a collage of characters that frequent a neighborhood bar. One man has just gotten home from prison and is adjusting to life on the outside. Another man is scheming to score some money for drugs. A young mother at the bar is just doing what she can to keep the city from taking her kids away. It was the first time I'd heard the voices and characters that inhabited so many of the solo-shows I loved come alive in an ensemble play. This show became my model for how the poetry of the speech of real people could be a captivating and understated pathway toward exploring a larger social theme. Eventually this theater company in residents at Center Stage New York would become my home base, producing and developing everything I would write while living in NYC. Stephen Adly Guirgis soon became a friend and mentor of mine, and members of his company, LAByrinth Theater Company, would develop, act in, and direct my shows over the next decade.

There were three communities of artists with whom I became acquainted in New York City. These communities frequently overlapped. The first community was LAByrinth Theater Company. Founded in 1992, LAByrinth was originally an exclusively Latino theater ensemble, and specialized in gritty, urban, comedic, downtown theater. It includes playwrights such as John Patrick Shanley, Jose Rivera, and Eric Bogosian. The second community in which I spent time was the Hip Hop Theater Festival. Created by solo-performer Danny Hoch in 2000, this festival now occurs regularly in New York, Chicago, Washington DC, and the San Francisco Bay Area.

Many of my own shows that were first developed at Center Stage would be presented in the Hip Hop Theater Festival. This community of artists includes solo-performers Danny Hoch, Will Powers, Nilaja Sun, and Sarah Jones, as well the performance poetry ensemble *Universes*, and a number of dance companies including Full Circle Soul and Rennie Harris Pure Movement. The third community, where I was more of a spectator in than a contributor, was the Nuyorican Poets Café. The Nuyorican was founded in 1973 by literary luminaries such as Miguel Piñero and Ntozake Shange. This legendary venue included on its roster of regular poets Saul Williams, Willie Perdomo, Tisch Benson, Suheir Hammad, and Amiri Baraka.

It would take an entire book to map out all the artistic relationship between these three communities, but they are numerous and interconnected. Within these intersecting circles of playwrights, actors, poets, dancers, directors and producers there is an expectation that the stories we tell will challenge audiences to grapple with tough issues. If what is made is merely a structurally sound story with entertainment value, it tends not be very well received by this group of artists. There is too much at stake in the world to be contributing more mindless distraction. For us, theater is a higher calling. Many anthropologists and historians have traced this desire back to the griot traditions of West Africa, known by Bantu speaking tribes as the “Living Libraries”, in which storytellers served as a community historians, philosophers, spiritualists, moralists, and social critics.

This “higher calling” is all well and good; however, leaning too hard on the “issue” at hand is dramaturgically deadly. The age-old agreement between storyteller

and audience is that one agrees to tell a story and the other agrees to listen. As soon as the storyteller stops doing his or her job, to insert a political message or teach the audience a lesson, all bets are off. As a playwright I often fall victim to the same mistakes I made in my first years as a dramatist; I too often let issue dictate narrative much to the detriment of the plot. My hopes in coming to grad school were to continue to write stories that “mattered”, and add some new tools to my tool box in the desire to develop strategies for plotting such scripts that let issues emerge organically through the characters needs; not through mine.

### *You Ain't Cuz You Not*

In October of 2002, while I was still living in New York, I was heading home from the subway at night when I was assaulted. A young man from the neighborhood robbed me. He and I fought. I filed a police report and few days later, when I spotted him on the street, I had him arrested. When I found out he was a minor and that the prosecuting attorney was trying to charge him as an adult, I dropped the charges. At the time I was teaching at a high school and many of my students were the same age and background as this young man. These events were troubling to me for a number of reasons. First and foremost, I no longer felt safe where I lived. On a deeper level, I started to really grapple with my own political beliefs. I was highly critical of housing trends and gentrification in New York. At the same time, I was a suburban kid from California taking up space in Brooklyn. I read and talked with great passion about the “Haves” and “Have-Nots” of New York City; however, when this particular “Have-Not”

tried to take what I had, it didn't feel so good. This all led to an existential crisis of sorts. If my life's work was ultimately about creating greater equity in the world, how did I, a middle class white man, fit into that? In other words, when the revolution comes, am I *the enemy*? The revolution never came, but an idea for a script did.

The first version of this script was entitled *All of the Above*. The first major event of the play happens when Black teacher named Joel is out with his Latina girlfriend, Alyssa, and she is sexual harassed by a group of Black teenagers. Joel gets into a fight with the young men and discovers the next week that one of the assailants is his student. As his relationship with Alyssa deteriorates, he becomes closer and closer with the student, indoctrinating the young man with his own radical politics and institutional racism of public education. Joel's "lessons" ultimately incite the young man to lead a revolt at school, sabotaging the state mandated standardized test. Joel ends up breaking up with his girlfriend and getting fired from his job. This meandering tragedy jumped from issues to issue (gentrification, public education, standardized testing) without really landing anywhere. Nothing felt resonant to me.

I looked at other plays that dealt with a direct clash of race and class. The best model I found was *The Dutchman* by Amiri Baraka. This two-person play follows the chance encounter of Lula, a white woman, and Clay, a Black man, both passengers on a New York City Subway. Lula flirts with Clay, insults Clay, and in the end kills Clay and begins to flirt with another Black man riding the train. The fire in those pages, penned in the early 1960s, still felt very real to me. There is a breaking point in the play where

Clay verbally lays into Lula about her dancing and what she thinks she knows about Blackness and about the white boys arguing over Charlie Parker's tortured genius. Reading this painful, passionate, and brutally honest monologue was extremely inspiring for me. These two characters weren't talking about the "issue" per se, they were *in it*, it was visceral not cerebral, they were attacking each other. No one said the word racism once. A telltale sign of underdeveloped piece of theater about racial dynamics is that a character has to use the word "racism" to convey a point – an issue I am still grappling with. It was raw, it was New York, and most important of all it left its audience thinking. It did not present a simple moral imperative or some tidy, take-away, sage advice. It raised questions instead of trying to answer them.

I scrapped *All of the Above* and began writing *You Ain't Cuz You Not*, based on the same inspiration, but much closer to the actual real events. The essential truth of my lived experience came through in these initial pages. After much development, the play is now a two-hander. The main character, Jacob, narrates much of the story. The second actor plays the young man that robs Jacob, as well as everyone else from a 13 year old girl Jacob knew from junior high, a police officer, a co-worker, and a make-up artist. This structure borrowed heavily from the solo-shows that were so influential to my early writing. There was the direct address storytelling utilized by many solo-performers. No set, no fancy costumes, just an actor telling a story to an audience as if catching up with an old friend in a bar; much in the vein of Spalding Gray or Mike Daisey. Another aspect of solo-performance that has always amazed me, is the ability to transform from one person to another on stage; the chameleon like quality of solo-performers that jump

instantly from one body and voice to the next. *You Ain't Cuz You Not* utilized both direct address and multiple character transformation to create a two-person show that utilized these two dramatic styles found in solo-performance.

The title *You Ain't Cuz You Not* comes from the song “This is Why I’m Hot” by the artist MIMS. It is a party anthem and was a hit wonder of the 2000s. It’s basically a braggadocio laundry list of why MIMS is “hot.” *You Ain't Cuz You Not* is what MIMS says to those that are not “hot.” To me, this phrase so simply signifies those inside and outside of a culture.

In my play, *You Ain't Cuz You Not*, Jacob, a white high school teacher, is heading home at night when a young Latino man, Cezar, begins following him home and asking for money. Jacob tries to reason with Cezar and find out why he needs the money. Cezar gets more and more aggressive and eventually attacks Jacob. The scenes between Jacob and Cezar are broken up by monologues and flashbacks into moments in Jacob’s life, such as when he was a child in an arcade and another child stole his quarter, when he was in Junior High School and challenged to fight for the first time, and moments of him as a teacher disciplining his own high school students. The second half of the play takes place post-robbery and follows Jacob’s new paranoia in the neighborhood, seeing Cezar again and having him arrested, and finally he decides to drop the charges. As Jacob struggles with his own fears, white guilt, and class guilt, the scenes are again broken by monologues or moments of heightened realism, such as a scene where Jacob and Cezar dance together on roller-skates. When Jacob is completely lost and unsure whether or not

to call the police, the character Uncle Ben from *Death of a Salesman* enters and gives him some worldly wisdom. My character Jacob, like the character Willie Loman in *Death of a Salesman*, is obsessed with wanting to be told he did the right thing. Willie wants to make sure he was a good father. Jacob needs to be reassured that he is a good person. Uncle Ben's lines, taken verbatim from Arthur Miller's text, about getting out of the city and his general dislike of Brooklyn, interested me. They are a fun artifact of how the "city" was viewed in the late 1940s – as place to escape from when you have succeeded. My play is very much about gentrification and the "city" as a place where the more affluent professionals are moving. Despite the sixty year gap in time, Uncle Ben's words felt remarkably appropriate and universal to my play two generations later.

*You Ain't Cuz You Not* follows Jacob as he grapples with where he fits into his neighborhood, to his work environment, and to his own masculinity. How does he, a white middle class man, fit into the type of change he wants to see in the world? This script, much more than my previous attempts, captured that very real question I had asked myself following the real events that inspired the story. There was less of an agenda, and more of an honest interrogation of these larger ideas in this version. The new structure, which veered away from naturalistic, realistic, situations, allowed for me to really explore the theatricality of the piece. The play jumps in time and presents multiple realities in ways that are highly fantastical and heightened. Despite its theatricality, this version felt far more honest to me. For the first time I found a way to explore a "bigger issue" through an extremely personal, non-linear, non-naturalistic narrative. Written during my first year of grad school, the play was workshopped by LAByrinth Theater Company and

directed by Stephen Adly Guirgis. During the workshop, a number of heated discussions emerged within the cast and audience. Many of the actors and members of the company were life-long New Yorkers and had strong feelings about the changing climate of New York City. Also, in the cast and crowd were new residents of New York and of Brooklyn who had their own strong feelings about gentrification and the role they were playing this cycle of “urban renewal.” This kind of conversation was exactly what I had hoped the play would bring. For this reason I would posit that this play was a success in engaging a social issue and in finding the most effective dramatic structure with which to do so. This summer the play is slotted for a production at the Old Red Lion Theatre in London.

### *Rivers of January*

In 2006 I visited Brazil to study the pedagogical practices of Paulo Freire, author of *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*. Over the next three years I made a total of five trips between New York City and Rio de Janeiro, Brazil. I was in the process of pursuing a job opportunity at the University of Rio as well dating a woman there. My own ideas about Brazil and Brazilians could not have been more naïve. The two biggest myths about Brazil are that Brazil is a color-blind racial utopia and that Brazilian women are these sexually liberated love goddesses. Let’s start with myth #1. It’s true that race and racial identity in Brazil are unique to Brazilians’ very unique history and racial make-up. Brazil is home to the largest Black population outside of Africa, the largest Japanese population outside of Japan, the largest Italian population outside of Italy as well as many other racial and ethnic groups. Brazil is home to one of the most diverse populations on



the planet. As a colony for two hundred years, the official language of Brazil was Tupi-Guarani, a language of the indigenous Tupi People. Following the abolition of slavery in 1888, all Brazilians had equal rights under the law. From the outside it could appear to be a racial utopia. On the inside, Brazil is rife with racial tension and class divisions. Afro-Brazilians, like their counterparts in much of the African Diaspora, are vastly overrepresented in poverty, prison, and the lowest standard of living in the country.

On to myth #2: What the world knows of Brazil is largely the images associated with Carnaval; beautiful women in brightly colored costumes dancing samba. The music and dance of Brazil have been exported through popular media to all reaches of the globe. Brazilian dance and culture is incredibly sensual. Coming from the West it is hard to understand this. American culture and sex politics is this intense duality of sexual repression and sexual aggression. Beyond these two extremes there is little to no room for sensuality. Most white American men are very uncomfortable dancing. Dancing is viewed as effeminate. White American men are “allowed” to express sexual interest in women, but to relate in more sensual terms violates a social code of how a man is supposed to act. Brazilians of all ages, races, and genders sing, dance and express a level of sensuality with one another that does not exist within the United States and much of Europe. When American men meet Brazilian woman there is often a misunderstanding regarding this notion of sensuality. When all one reads is sex cues all one can see is sex cues. For example dancing samba is not an overtly sexual dance; however, from a Western perspective it is extremely sexual. My time abroad taught me about my own misguided understanding of Brazilian race politics and sex politics.

Like many others before me, I saw Brazil as a post-race society. The beautiful multiracial images I'd been sold my whole life, in films from *Black Orpheus* to *City of God*, had really convinced me that despite its other social ills, Brazil was at least a land of racial harmony. These classic misunderstandings led to many awkward, hilarious, and occasionally dangerous situations.

At a Portuguese Language intensive in Rio I befriended another American from the North East who had recently moved to Brazil to run a non-profit community center. Over the next few years I got to know more of his story. He told me what it was like for him growing up as a first generation American and then living abroad. I learned about the circumstances of his sudden departure from the United States. On a number of occasions I transported packages from NYC to Rio that he claimed were for his community center. He and I became acquainted with another ex-pat from New York who was researching a book on the way in which the history of slavery is taught in Brazil compared with the United States. Through conversations with this gentleman I learned all about Brazil's Blood Laws, racial classifications, and how the legacy of slavery has defined socio-economic stratification. The more time I spent in Brazil, the more intrigued I became with its unique take on race politics and class tensions.

Not long after my last trip to Brazil, I found myself volunteering for Barack Obama's presidential campaign. On November 2, 2008 the United States elected its first Black president. Obama, the son of an African man and a white woman, by genealogy is

just as much a white man as a black one. Obama is never referred to as a bi-racial person. His race has been defined to the world by uniquely American blood-laws dating back to the antebellum south. Some social critics posit that Obama's presidency signals the end of racism and race politics altogether. I kept thinking how in Brazil, with its blood-laws in many ways being the perfect reversal of those found in the U.S., Obama would *not* be a Black man at all. I never landed the job at the University of Rio, but again I found a play germinating in my head.

I wrote my first draft of *Rivers of January*, a full-length play loosely based on my experiences in Brazil, in about six weeks. This was the quickest I'd ever written a draft of a full-length play. At the time I was in my second year of grad school and preparing for my Professional Development Workshop (PDW) a week of rehearsals with a guest director followed by a public reading. Before starting the script I already knew a few things about the structure of the play. I was very much inspired by a South African playwright named Ian Bruce who wrote the Fluer Du Cap winning script, *Groundswell*. This play, which I had seen at South Africa's National Arts Festival and brought back to the United States, is set in a rural mining town and follows the story of three men bound by a shared history of racial subjugation and the onset of class war. Through these three characters the enormous issues of racism and the legacy of apartheid were personalized and deftly explored. *Groundswell* also skillfully set up the threat of a bloody revolution boiling just below the surface. It was my hope that my play about Brazil would cover some of the same themes explored as well as plot elements that

*Groundswell* dealt with in South Africa. For this reason, structurally I modeled my play after this one.

Like *Groundswell*, my script had three characters, and attempted to utilize unity of place and action to heighten dramatic tension and really create a pressure cooker for the story. *Rivers of January* is the story of Ravi, a former hedge fund trader, who moved to Rio de Janeiro to escape his unhealthy lifestyle and try and do something positive for a change. In Rio he has become the CEO of a nonprofit community center that offers free job skill classes to residents of the favela where it is located. The play begins when two friends of Ravi's, Silas and Nate, head down to Rio to visit Ravi for New Years Eve. Silas and Nate have unsettled grievances with one another. Both men are carrying packages for Ravi that they believe to be supplies for the community center. Ravi is desperately struggling to save his community center and stop his friends from attacking one another.

Unfortunately, the first draft of my script lost a lot of steam along the way. Instead of a tightly unified action, a multitude of subplots were competing with (and beating out) what I have conceived my A-story to be. I thought I was writing a play about an American in Brazil caught between his desire to good and the on the ground realities of violence and poverty. What I had written in my early draft was the story of two American men on vacation fighting about an ex-girlfriend. We never meet this girlfriend and she is not depicted as particularly likeable. This was a problem. Without solving any of the major structural problems the play was produced as part of the

University of Texas New Theatre (UTNT) through the Department of Theatre and Dance. This rehearsal process and production proved invaluable to me in highlighting the flaws of the script and identifying some possible solutions. A friend of mine from New York, and PHD candidate in the Anthropology Department, attended the show with a woman from her Department. The woman was an Afro-Brazilian, born and raised in Rio de Janeiro. I was incredibly nervous to speak with her after the show. When I did meet her she immediately gave me a hug and thanked me for writing the play. She said that the piece really took her home and that I had represented her city well. This was incredibly validating and great motivation to revisit the text and tighten up the drama. Authenticity will only get you so far.

Along the way of figuring out the script something very interesting happened. Rio de Janeiro started to make front-page headlines about mounting class tension and violence. During the time I began sketching and drafting the play some huge events transpired. Brazil won bids for both the 2014 World Cup and the 2016 Olympics. Upon winning these bids, police and military began to “pacify” the favelas, slum neighborhoods surrounding urban areas. For the first time in over a decade, police attempted to establish a permanent presence in slum neighborhoods where hundreds of thousands of poor people live under the rule of local drug cartels. The situation in Brazilian favelas is unlike anywhere else on the planet. As I created a fictional tale of Americans in Rio, the world watched preludes to an unofficial civil war breakout. The stakes of my play, or lack thereof, suddenly felt much more immediate and urgent. Not that I was trying to make Newspaper Theater (a Brazilian street theater that performed the

day's news), but writing a play without acknowledging this historical moment felt irresponsible.

My next draft of the play focused entirely on the stakes in relation to the very current reality in Rio de Janeiro. Instead of letting the voices in my head and personal memories guide me, I was as pragmatic as possible in revising and cutting so as to maximize dramatic potential. In writing *You Ain't Cuz You Not* I needed to return to the personal to unlock the drama, but with *Rivers of January* I needed to move away from the personal and let the real events be more of a jumping off point. I gave Ravi real and immediate needs. From one friend he needs funding from another he needs a documentary. Instead of smuggling video games to sell, as was the case in a previous draft, I made Ravi involved in an illegal arms trade. I wanted the play to ask the question: Are we witnessing a drug war or a class war? How are they different? How are they the same? Whose side should we be on? The stakes felt far more resonant, but something still hadn't gelled for the story.

For me the play is still in process. The danger of the world still never really enters the play as I would like it to. I might need a fourth character. I might need a Brazilian to show up. At one point in the script Ravi confesses to Nate that the reason he so desperately wants the center to stay open involves a prostitute named Bruna that he had dated and was recently killed. Ravi believes the center provides an opportunity for woman like Bruna to avoid such a tragic outcome. A mentor of mine and New York City based playwright Seth Rosenfeld, looked over the script recently and gave me some very

good advice. He said, “Ben, I love the Bruna story, but it’s kind of a Rubber Ducky Monologue.” I asked him to explain. According to Seth there is an old dramatic writing trope where a character gets very emotional and makes a speech to explain their psychology and their subsequent actions. (The Rubber Ducky comes from an invented scenario in which a man who killed his mother is questioned by the police and asked why he did it. The man responds with a long story about how when he was a boy his mother took his rubber ducky away from him and that is why he killed her.) Instead of placing Ravi’s motivation in Bruna and events from the past, Seth suggested I find a way to activate Ravi’s motivation in the present and preferably on stage.

Seth offered me one other gem. He told me, “You wrote the play toward surprise, instead of suspense.” By that he meant I kept all the dangers a secret till the end. Our main character Ravi is in a life and death struggle, only we (the audience) don’t discover this till the last two minutes of the play. If the audience knew what was going on with Ravi from the beginning, we could empathize and feel some of that tension, instead of just being surprised at the end. I’d never considered the notions of surprise versus suspense before. I decided to study up on my suspense writing structures. I looked to the king of suspense; Alfred Hitchcock. I remembered hearing that his film *The Rope* was based on a play. I picked up a copy of the script by the playwright Patrick Hamilton. Sure enough, within the first five pages we find out that two men have murdered a colleague of theirs. There is no surprise as far as what they did. Instead there is far more delicious tension around whether or not they will get away with it. In my next draft of *Rivers of January* I plan to retool the plot to utilize such a notion of suspense. While the

script has many successful moments, as a whole it does not yet engage the social issues or hold the drama in a structurally sound manner. I have been invited to develop the script further at New York Stage and Film this summer.

### *You Can't Win*

In 2007 two film producers from Miami approached me. I had written a screenplay for them in 2005 based on a collection of short stories. They passed me a copy of the book *You Can't Win* by Jack Black, published in 1926. To my knowledge it is the first autobiography of a criminal ever to be published in the United States. I was instantly taken with the language of the book. There was a moment I remember on my first read where I thought of the autobiography of Malcolm X. Both Malcolm and Jack had lost a parent at a young age and found themselves living lives of crime. In both autobiographies they mentioned the importance of language. When Malcolm was a numbers runner in Harlem he had to quickly catch up with the slang of the day and not betray his rural Michigan origins. At one point Malcolm claimed to speak New York vernacular better than a native. Like Malcolm, Jack took pride in soaking up the language of the street and crime syndicates with which he was associated. Ultimately, both men reformed and were quite outspoken about equity and justice in America.

I never thought I would respond to Jack Black's story the way I did. In the final years of Black's life he traveled the country speaking about the dangers of our criminal justice system. Black claimed that we criminalized poor kids in America and that if we



weren't careful we would find ourselves with a generation full of young men in the "system" and a prison industry that spanned the entire country. Sadly, Black's warnings were not heeded and his words have proven to be ominously prophetic. I wrote a few drafts of a screenplay for the producers, but when it was announced that another production team had a script of the book *green lit* (approved by a studio for shooting), my producers backed off. From what I gather, the film was never made and the book has remained in the public domain. I tucked my notebooks and drafts of that script away and returned to playwriting.

As I wrote the screenplay for *You Can't Win*, I never considered adapting the book into a play and it never occurred to me that it could be a musical. I've never been a fan of musical theater. In many ways it felt to me like the antithesis of what I came to theater for. Most of my experience with musical theater stemmed from junior high school productions of *Guys and Dolls* or other romantic comedies. They seemed to value cuteness and cleverness above anything else. While I now recognize there is a long and rich tradition of socially engaged musical theater, this is not what I was being exposed to in school. As I began to create theater as a teenager I always scoffed at musicals. To me, there were musical theater people and there were those of us who made "real" theater. Musical theater also seemed to reinforce a social structure of popularity and hegemony. The star system: A piece of theater with a few leads and then countless, nameless others. The theater I felt I was making was ensemble theater – more like socialism. We are all in this together and must realize that the group is more important than my individual need

for attention and approval, unlike the cutesy musicals for the pretty kids to crack jokes and sing solos while the rest of use hovered in the back.

For whatever reason, my last few years in New York I was given a lot free tickets to see new musicals. Some of the more memorable performances I saw were *Caroline or Change*, *Passing Strange*, and *Billy Elliot*. These were all contemporary socially engaged musicals. *Caroline or Change*, Tony Kushner's first foray into musical theater, is moving family drama set amidst the Civil Rights Movement that artfully explores race and class. *Passing Strange* by Stew is the story of a young Black man's travels through Europe in search of his authentic voice. An Odyssey of sorts, this play was arguably the most exciting piece of theater I'd seen in years. *Billy Elliot* by Lee Hall was the biggest surprise to me. I thought it was going to be about a boy doing ballet. I found the story incredibly moving. An interrogation of masculinity and family set against the backdrop of Thatcher era union busting. The song "Solidarity" is the most emotionally moving and brilliantly staged moment I've ever witnessed on stage. I recall what Paul Robeson said about music being the most direct route to emotion truth. Robeson once said, "Get them to sing your song and they will want to know who you are."

For a number of years I'd had this nagging desire to revisit *You Can't Win*. I don't know if was all the musicals I had recently ingested or the highly lyrical nature of the text, but something told me it could make an interesting musical. Not the cheesy musical comedies I'd avoided all my life, but something more like these contemporary socially engaged musicals I'd been seeing. Austin is a live music town first and

foremost. Texas might not be the best place for me to develop my more urban dramas, but what better place to develop a musical about a western outlaw. Within less than a week Jenn Hartman, an MFA student in Drama for and Theatre for Youth and Communities (DTYC) Program had agreed to contribute lyrics and music and Ethan Greene, a PHD candidate in the School of Music, had signed to handle the arrangements and orchestration.

*You Can't Win* was a first for me on a number of fronts. It was my first musical, my first adapted theater, and my first historical work. Unlike everything I'd written for the stage before it, this was entirely someone else's story. I needed to find a new entryway in. I tried to see if the play was already in the book and all I needed to do was dig it out. I pieced together pages, taken verbatim from the book, in a string of scenes. My version the story begins at the funeral of Jack's mother. Jack and his father move into a boarding house in Kansas City where Jack gets his first job collecting milk bills for the milk man. While Jack is collecting a bill at a local brothel, police raid the brothel and Jack is arrested. When he gets out of jail and returns to the brothel he meets Julia, the youngest prostitute, who asks him out on a date. They go out together and make plans to run away. Jack leaves his father, but Julia never shows up and Jack heads out of town alone. On the road he is arrested for vagrancy and befriends a slightly older boy named Smiler. Smiler and Jack escape from prison together and begin robbing houses. At one house, Smiler is killed and Jack returns to prison. This time Jack meets Foot and Half George, the leader of a crime syndicate. George gets Jack a lawyer and becomes mentor to Jack as he continues in a life of crime. At a gathering of homeless men in the forest,

George is killed and Jack goes on the road alone for the first time. He ends up in Chicago and briefly reunites with Julia before being arrested again. This time he is tortured in prison. When he gets out he becomes a much more aggressive thief, robbing people at gunpoint. He is arrested again and meets a famous journalist who ultimately helps Jack reform and encourages him to write the book the play is based on.

My first draft of the script was almost word for word taken from the autobiography and was nearly unreadable. It was not yet a play. My second pass, I decided to focus on specific relationships. I isolated Jack's relationships with Julia, Smiler, Foot and a Half George, and Fremont Older. This approach proved far more fruitful. At the same time I was figuring out what it meant to work collaboratively on a script. I'd have lengthy discussions with my songwriter, Jenn Hartmann, about what I wanted a song to do for the narrative. We'd go our separate ways and in a few days she'd sing me a song. I'd listen to the song and again explain what I needed from the song that it wasn't yet doing. This never-ending process frustrated us both to no end. Finally, I sat down and wrote word for word the text that I wanted the lyrics to cover. I even wrote this text to rhyme. I had no melody or instrumentation in mind, but I knew these words more or less needed to be the words. This worked great! Jenn could write the songs she wanted to and the words fit the script.

I was so task oriented as far as just getting the script completed I really lost track of the larger social implications that had first interested me in the process. Perhaps forgetting about the politics was the best thing that could have happened. Every choice

made was to serve the story. The musical received four concert staged-readings as part of the University Co-op's Cohen New Works Festival. I had mixed feelings attending the performance. I was very proud of certain scenes and musical numbers. A song Julia sings about her childhood and how she became a prostitute was very successful to me. It revealed much about the character Julia, it was emotionally resonant, and I think it is just a beautiful song. The title song *You Can't Win*, sung by Jack toward the end of the show also felt really strong to me. It captured many of the themes and larger ideas of the prison industrial complex in simple personal terms and what I found to be quite engaging poetic language. For most of the show I must admit that I was rather bored. The main character Jack has minimal agency throughout the script. He has little to no arc as a character, in that he hasn't really changed, and rather than feeling like an epic adventure the piece felt extremely episodic and static. In a future development of the book and lyrics I would like to go back and really focus on Jack's story and journey.

Regardless of the work's critical reception or future I do feel like I have already achieved a number of my goals. The rehearsal process was collaborative and as ensemble based as possible. I was very intentional about not wanting to replicate the process of musical theater I had experienced as a teenager. For starters, we did not hold auditions. I let it be known within the Department of Theatre and Dance that anyone who felt they could sing and act that wanted to be in the show was in; no questions asked. The cast, more than a dozen mainly undergraduate students, plays over 50 roles. I believe we achieved an ensemble. There are a few more featured characters, as the piece is based on

an autobiography, but all in all I am very happy with how often we get to hear each and every individual voice of the cast members.

Additionally, I've been thinking more about what it means to be developing this play with undergraduate students at UT. Most of my work has been with high school students in New York. The only universities I have worked with are New York University and The Juilliard School. I've had great experiences working with the acting students at both NYU and Juilliard, and I have always been aware of the tuition at these institutions and what that means for the student body. More often than not I have been working with young people who come from a professional class background. Here at UT that is not always the case. In fact this is one of the most affordable universities in the United States. Many of our students were accepted through a policy to create regional and socioeconomic diversity at the university that offers students from anywhere in the state that are the top ten percent of their graduating class admission to UT. In the 2009 *Fisher v. University of Texas*, the Fifth U.S. Circuit Court of Appeals ruled in favor of keeping UT's "10 Percent Plan" making the University of Texas one of the most diverse state university systems in the country.

Like the main character in my musical, many of my students come from more rural and poor backgrounds. I've had many students who have shared with me what a huge deal it is for them to even be in college. Higher education was not assumed or expected to be a part of their future. A number of my students have shared with me that they have friends or family that have at one time or another been in the criminal justice

system. Working on a show that to me is all about class equity and opportunity with our students has been really interesting. I have greatly appreciated the way the cast members have engaged with the text and really brought their authentic selves to the process.

Developing *You Can't Win* has led me consider for the first time how a process can be more socially engaged. This script is a first draft and is the farthest of three from meeting my goals for engaging a social issue and meeting my goals from a craft standpoint. It is my hope to continue to develop the book and lyrics. My collaborators and I are preparing a new draft and some demos of the music to submit to the O'Neill's National Musical Theater Conference this fall.

As I complete my final year of grad school and look back at the plays that I have written it feels as though *You Ain't Cuz You Not* was the play I needed to write first. It was my opportunity to really explode a theme and take my structure in all sorts of new directions. *Rivers of January* was the play I came to grad school to write. When I complete it I believe it will be a perfect reflection the type of stories I most want to tell and the style with which I want to tell them. I imagine it will serve as my theatrical calling card of sorts. *You Can't Win* was the black sheep of the bunch. This was the play I never thought I'd write and could only have written in grad school. This was the most unexpected, challenging, and in some ways the most satisfying. These three plays differ in every way possible and are the body of work that best represents my time at the University of Texas.

I've heard people ask of dramatic works, "What is it about," about with a big "A."

In some ways everything I've written is about wealth and poverty. *You Ain't Cuz You Not* examined gentrification and the tensions that ensue when the *Haves* push the *Have-Nots* out of a neighborhood. *Rivers of January* looked at Americans abroad amidst the greatest disparity in wealth on the planet and the social ills endemic to such inequality. *You Can't Win* is a sociological study of crime in America by way of one man's journey.

Looking back on the body of work I have written during my time here it appears there has been a progression from writing about myself, to writing stories inspired by my life, to finding my voice while writing other people's stories entirely. I can't say if these three years speak for the future trends my writing will follow. What I do know is that I have a far more varied approach than I did prior to my time here. The manner in which I enter into a story and interrogate an idea has moved far beyond my own lived experience. I see this as a natural and necessary outgrowth of my interests and motivations for writing plays in the first place. It would be extremely limiting to always frame my work from my own lens and worldview. In creating socially engaged theater my perspective, my lived experiences and my voice will always be a consideration, but they will no longer be the final word, or even the first.

I've been thinking more lately about the themes I keep being drawn to and what I hope to accomplish by exploring them. I would like my work to be a catalyst for change in the world. Sometimes, despite my better judgment, I just want to educate my audience. Sometimes I merely want to pose a question and not answer it. In moments of self-doubt about the power of art amidst the onslaught of tweeting and texting and



youtubing and facebooking and whatever technology will disrupt our lives next, I wonder why I even bother to invest my time in an art form as archaic as theater. Sometimes I am not sure whether I believe if art has the power to make a difference in the world. A few years ago a play about wrongly imprisoned death row inmates called *The Exonerated* played a major role in a national moratorium on death row sentencing. As a result laws were changed. A few years later a one-woman show by Nilaja Sun entitled *No Child* created debate across the country over the *No Child Left Behind* education policy. Does theater have to be political? I think shifting a consciousness is just as vital. I thought differently about the AIDS epidemic in the gay community after attending Tony Kushner's *Angels in America*. I thought differently about the Cuban revolution after seeing Eduardo Machado's play *The Cook*. What effect *The Crucible* had on McCarthyism, I couldn't say, but I think it's safe to surmise that Arthur Miller was outraged with what was going on around him and writing that play was how he responded. Theater is my weapon (for now) and I will make with it what I can. This is what I am reaching for.

you ain't cuz you not  
a play by Ben Snyder

## CHARACTERS

JACOB CLANCY: Idealist, young, high school teacher. White, male, 20s.

\*CEZAR: Quick and abrasive young man. Latino, male, 16.

\*LITTLE BULLY: Tough, mean-eyed 11 year old boy.

\*GOOD TEACHER: Seasoned, veteran educator. 40s.

\*NICOLE JOHNSON: No-nonsense, street wise, young woman. Black, 13.

\*MAKEUP ARTIST: A cheerful makeup artist.

\*UNCLE BEN: A stolid man, with a moustache and an authoritative air. White, 60s.

\*OFFICER LOPEZ: A powerful, old school, neighborhood police woman. 40s.

\*Roles could be played by multiple actors or one actor.

Act 1 Scene 1

In the darkness the sound of a train rumbling into a station is heard.

At Rise: A Brooklyn street. A bodega. A subway entrance. Cezar lingers on the street leaning up against a payphone. Jacob ascends the subway stairs and heads down the block. He passes Cezar.

CEZAR

What up fam?

JACOB

Huh?

CEZAR

Whatsup?

JACOB

Oh. Hi.

CEZAR

Where you goin?

JACOB

(confused)

I'm going home.

CEZAR

Yo I could get a dolla?

JACOB

What?

CEZAR

You gotta dolla for me, fam?

JACOB

Nah, sorry.

Jacob continues walking. Cezar follows.

CEZAR  
C'mon fam.

JACOB  
Sorry.

CEZAR  
Lemme get a dollar.

Jacob looks back but keeps on walking.

CEZAR cont.  
I know you gotta dollar. Give up that dollar man.

Cezar is getting closer and closer. Jacob is trying to ignore him, but is speeding up his pace.

CEZAR cont.  
The fuck you goin. I axed you a question . Yo, lemme get a dollar son!

Feeling Cezar close behind Jacob stops and faces him. Cezar has one of his hands in the pocket of his hoody.

JACOB  
(scared)  
Aright man!

CEZAR  
Aright what?

Cezar removes his hand.

JACOB  
I thought- Thought you had something there.

CEZAR  
Thought I had what?

JACOB  
Thought you had something in your hand.

CEZAR  
Why you so shook, fam?

No, it's uh-	JACOB
You mad shook, son-	CEZAR
It's just dark out.	JACOB
You could see me?	CEZAR
I see you.	JACOB
I see you too. You gotta dollar?	CEZAR
Why do you-	JACOB
Just need one dollar.	CEAZAR
What for?	JACOB
I need it.	CEZAR
Why do you need a dollar?	JACOB
Cuz I do.	CEZAR
What are you tryna buy?	JACOB
I ain't tryna buy nothing.	CEZAR
So what do you need it for?	JACOB

Does it matter? CEZAR

Of course it matters, it's my dollar. JACOB

I need it to get home. CEZAR

Yeah? JACOB

I just need a dollar. CEZAR

Where's home? JACOB

I gotta get back to my father's place. CEZAR

Where's that? JACOB

Bushwick. CEZAR

Okay. Why don't I walk you to the subway. JACOB

For what? CEZAR

I can swipe you through. I got an unlimited. JACOB

Train don't go there. CEZAR

No? JACOB

It don't go where he be at. CEZAR

JACOB

So how do you get there?

CEZAR

The bus.

JACOB

What bus?

CEZAR

The 60.

JACOB

(pointing)

That runs right down there?

CEZAR

Yeah, where you seen me at.

JACOB

You want to get on the bus?

CEZAR

Yeah I just need a dolla.

JACOB

Bus costs more than a dollar.

CEZAR

I got the rest.

JACOB

How often does it come?

CEZAR

I dunno.

JACOB

I'll swipe you on.

CEZAR

You gonna gimme a card?

JACOB

No. But I'll put you on the bus.

CEZAR



Why don't you just gimme a dollar?

JACOB

You're tryna get home, I'll put you on the bus you need. You want me to swipe you onto the bus?

CEZAR

Bus takes a long time to get here.

JACOB

I'll wait with you.

CEZAR

You gone wait with me?

JACOB

I just said I would. Show me where the bus comes.

CEZAR

You gone be waitin a minute out there.

JACOB

I don't mind. You wanna do this?

CEZAR

Aight, bet.

They start to walk back to the bus stop.  
They freeze as lights pull tight on Jacob.

## Scene 2

Jacob turns to face us and walks downstage.

### JACOB

The police would later ask me why I went to the bus stop with him. At the time I was thinking I should probably get to a public place. And hey, maybe he did just want to get home. I shop at that corner store pretty regularly. The guy at the counter and I make jokes from time to time about the weather or the expiration dates on his milk. I know how to walk in the street.

(beat)

A friend of mine who was in between jobs and delivering for a weed service got robbed recently. He was stabbed with a box-cutter in the armpit and suffered a collapsed lung, which nearly killed him. My vocation is a bit less hazardous, but still, the whole incident was pretty unnerving. Needless to say I was a little jumpy that night. What? You wouldn't be?

(beat)

I really hadn't been in a situation like this since I was a kid. I tried to put on my adult face, but for some reason all I could think of was *Street Fighter II*.

Lights shift. We are in an early 90's video arcade.

### JACOB cont.

In 1991 Capcom released the sequel to its previous arcade hit. This was the fighting game to end all fighting games. If you played video games and you were alive in 1991 you know exactly what I'm talking about. And this wasn't some herb shit either. Dudes would bring their girlfriends to watch them play. Crews would crowd the console to check out each other's new fighting styles. One time 11 guys on motorcycles with matching jackets tried to ride up into the arcade. I kid you not. It was like that. Anything could happen.

(beat)

My character was Chun Li. My fighting style was considered by some to be "cheap" or cowardly. It consisted of bouncing off the wall into a heel-kick aerial assaults. I'd keep this up till my opponent saw stars, then release the lightning leg. Most guys preferred Ryu, Ken, or Guile. When Guile won he would say, "Are you man enough to fight me?" When Chun Li took you out, she would laugh in your face, which I still find to be a lot more rugged.

(beat)

It was a rough environment, at least it felt that way when I was ten, but the violence was on screen.

The sounds of an intense Street Fighter II match. Jacob as a 10-year old eagerly watches two guys play.

A Little Bully appears and also watches.

Ten-Year-Old Jacob places a quarter up on the top of the console. The Little Bully eyes the quarter.

The game ends.

Ten-Year-Old Jacob reaches for his quarter but the Little Bully beats him to it. His hand rests on top of the quarter. The two boys look at each other. The Little Bully glares at 10-Year Old Jacob, who begins to look scared.

What you lookin at?	LITTLE BULLY
What?	JACOB
You gotta a starin problem?	LITTLE BULLY
No.	JACOB
The fuck you lookin at?	LITTLE BULLY
Nnn...nno...nothin.	JACOB
So get your hand off my money.	LITTLE BULLY
But-	JACOB
But what?	LITTLE BULLY
That was-	JACOB

LITTLE BULLY

Ooh! You made the time run out! I was gonna come in!

JACOB

My mom-

LITTLE BULLY

What you say bout my mama?!

JACOB

I didn't-

LITTLE BULLY

Now you talkin bout my Mama! You really do wanna get popped in your mouth.

JACOB

No, I-

LITTLE BULLY

What? You what? Say it you stupid little bitch.

JACOB

Nothin, you wanna play?

LITTLE BULLY

Do I wanna play? You tryna be gay with me now?

JACOB

No. I'm not.

LITTLE BULLY

You better not be.

JACOB

Let's just play.

LITTLE BULLY

You think you this boss a me? I will clock you upside your head so hard you won't even know what hit you. Think I won't?

JACOB

No I-

LITTLE BULLY

NO?!

JACOB

No, that's not what I-

LITTLE BULLY

I will drag your little white ass outside and knock you upside your head. Say I won't. Say I won't.

Jacob is silent.

LITTLE BULLY

That's what I thought, sucka butt.

Little Bully puts the quarter in.  
Jacob watches him play.

LITTLE BULLY

Go ahead put your quarter up.

Jacob doesn't move. Little Bully  
plays on.

LITTLE BULLY

See that one. Blouw. That's what I'm talkin about. You got banked on. That's how Ima whoop ya ass in real life, just like that, watch.

The Little Bully laughs. Jacob backs  
away.

JACOB

(to audience)

It was my first time having something of mine taken by someone else. Right in my face.

LITTLE BULLY

In your face!

JACOB

It was only a quarter, but the world was suddenly less safe. Sure, I could have said something, complained to the owner, I mean I knew him.

The Little Bully plays more seriously, his  
eyes glow by the light of the game.

JACOB cont.

But something told me that quarter was gone.

Lights fade out on the Little Bully and the arcade.

JACOB cont.

He had a look in his eyes. It's a look I'd never seen before. I have since come across it many times, and on occasion have tried to imitate. But there's really no fakin jacks. Either you have it or you don't. It's a look born of lived experience. As my liberal arts education would later teach me to better articulate; it's how the have-not's look at the haves in a world where the haves have it all.

(beat)

Anyone here ever traveled at all? You people travel at all? Some of you? Its funny how you can find that same exact look all over the world. The suburbs of Paris, the Favela's of Rio, or right here, in good old Brooklyn, USA. Maybe you're sitting next to someone right now with that look in their eyes.

(to an audience member)

Well don't stare at em. Shit.

A loud car drives by and lights shift.

Act 1 Scene 3

Jacob and Cezar stand at the bus stop.  
Every so often a car can be heard passing  
by. The bodega is now closed. Cezar stares  
at Jacob.

CEZAR  
I already seen a few pass by.

JACOB  
How long you usually wait?

CEZAR  
At night? Pshh, it'll be a minute.

JACOB  
Alright.

CEZAR  
You wanna wait?

JACOB  
I don't mind.

Jacob eyes the empty block.

CEZAR  
Who you lookin for?

JACOB  
Nobody.

CEZAR  
Where you live at?

JACOB  
I live in the neighborhood.

CEZAR  
Yeah?

Jacob nods.

CEZAR cont  
I ain't seen you round here.

I'm around.	JACOB
You work round here?	CEZAR
No.	JACOB
Where you work at?	CEZAR
The city.	JACOB
Oh word, so you ballin outa control?	CEZAR
Not really.	JACOB
Nah, you look like a baller to me.	CEZAR
Yeah?	JACOB
Oh hell yeah.	CEZAR
I teach.	JACOB
You a teacher?	CEZAR
Yeah.	JACOB
Oh shit, son! Where you teach at?	CEZAR
High school.	JACOB



What school?  
CEZAR

I teach in the city.  
JACOB

Where at?  
CEZAR

The city.  
JACOB

You just got paid huh?  
CEZAR

What?  
JACOB

You just got paid?  
CEZAR

No.  
JACOB

Nah cuz, my teacher, she just got paid. You just got paid too right?  
CEZAR

No.  
JACOB

Y'all don't get paid on the same day?  
CEZAR

I guess not.  
JACOB

So what day you get paid on?  
CEZAR

That's none of your business. We're waiting for a bus.  
JACOB

What?  
CEZAR

JACOB

Look, I'm doing you a favor right now.

CEZAR

The fuck you say?

JACOB

I said, I'm out here doing you favor-

CEZAR

Don't be talkin out ya fuckin neck!

Jacob looks at Cezar.

JACOB

You know what- that's it.

CEZAR

Word?

JACOB

I'm trying to help out, but you can't talk me like that.

CEZAR

Oh word, son?

JACOB

Yeah.

CEZAR

It's like that?

JACOB

Yeah, it's like that.

CEZAR

Don't get it twisted son, I will still fuck you up.

JACOB

See, there's no need for all that.

CEZAR

You gettin me tight right now.

JACOB

Good luck getting home.

Jacob starts to walk away.

CEZAR

The fuck you goin?!

Cezar starts to walk after Jacob.

CEZAR cont.

I'm talkin to you! Don't you fuckin walk away from me, son! I'm talkin to you!

Jacob speeds up and so does Cezar.

CEZAR cont.

Don't make me run! I will fuck you up, son!

Cezar is gaining on Jacob. Jacob finally stops and faces him. Cezar looks Jacob dead in the eye as he swaggers up to him. A few paces away, Cezar freezes mid-stride. Lights pull in on Jacob as he heads down stage.

Act 1 Scene 4

JACOB

Did I just shake a beehive? Should I have just given him a dollar when he asked for it? Some of you are probably thinking to yourselves, yes , you should have. And had I known what that night had in store for me, I might be inclined to agree with you.

(beat)

He said, “My teacher.” He *has* a teacher. He attends a school somewhere. He is a student to someone.

The sounds of public high school can be heard.

JACOB cont.

A good teacher once told me-

A Good Teacher appears. They are at a staff meeting with many other teachers.

GOOD TEACHER

Mr. Clancy-

JACOB

Can I-

GOOD TEACHER

There are veteran educators here offering you constructive feedback.

JACOB

Can I say something?

GOOD TEACHER

You’ve said plenty-

JACOB

I feel like I’m being attacked right now.

GOOD TEACHER

No one’s attacking you.

JACOB

Well it sounded an awful lot like a personal attack.

GOOD TEACHER

Why was Xavier standing on the desk?

JACOB

What do you want me to do? Kick him out of class everyday?

GOOD TEACHER

I'm not suggesting that. I don't think anyone in here is suggesting that.

JACOB

(to another teacher)

Thank you for the suggestion, Mr. Asher, but I'm not teaching an AP English class. I don't have that luxury. Do-Now's aren't going to fly with Jason Torres or Xavier Lewis who shouldn't even be back at school by the way, or J.R., or Jessica or Crystal Soto or-

GOOD TEACHER

We all know who's in your room-

JACOB

Do you? Have you had them?

GOOD TEACHER

I've subbed in there. I know exactly who you have in there 2<sup>nd</sup> and 5<sup>th</sup>, I'm not pretending it's an easy group to manage. But you set yourself up.

JACOB

I set myself up? I didn't put that dream team together.

GOOD TEACHER

Can you stop making excuses?

JACOB

See, I find that comment disrespectful.

GOOD TEACHER

All I asked was, why was Xavier standing on the desk?

JACOB

I don't know. I didn't tell him to stand on the desk.

GOOD TEACHER

Well did you tell him to get down?

JACOB

No. I didn't. You want to know why? Because Xavier is 300 pounds and has a temper and should probably be medicated. And why is he even back in my room? He's still suspended. This has been an ongoing problem all year.

GOOD TEACHER

Be that as it may, anytime you allow behavior like that, when you give them permission-

JACOB

Permission?-

GOOD TEACHER

-to do anything that would not be acceptable in a private, in a suburban school, when you lower your expectations of these kids, and allow them to get away with that behavior you are doing these young people a disservice.

JACOB

I'm doing them a disservice?

GOOD TEACHER

Yes.

JACOB

Is this some kind of passive aggressive racial thing?

GOOD TEACHER

You're the one that said this wasn't a problem at your last school.

JACOB

It wasn't.

GOOD TEACHER

You want to know why that is? You want to know what the problem is?

JACOB

Sure. What's *my* problem?

GOOD TEACHER

*Your* problem, Mr. Clancy, is that you want to be liked.

JACOB

That's my problem?

GOOD TEACHER

Yes. You're not here to make friends. You're not doing yourself any favors trying so hard to be all buddy buddy with the kids.

JACOB

I-

GOOD TEACHER cont.

I have my friends outside of this school and I relate them one way. And I have my students, and there is a line that we don't cross. I don't care if they hate my guts, as long as they're learning. Think about it for a second. What if your dentist or your doctor's biggest concern was getting you to like them on a personal level? That could be a little troublesome- you get where I'm going with this?

JACOB

Can you give me a concrete example?

JACOB

Sure. The stuff you do out in the doorway-

JACOB

Shaking their hands? Greeting my students-

GOOD TEACHER

Learning the kids handshakes-

JACOB

That's just-

GOOD TEACHER

That's just unprofessional is what that is. And most of those handshakes are gang affiliated. Yeah. What kind of message are you sending out to your students? And when they walk all over you, you have no option but to kick them out or let *them* run the room. Which is why we're having this conversation. You can't be an effective teacher if you are afraid of these kids. You need to be the adult in the room.

Good Teacher disappears.

Lights suddenly shift. Jacob is in a classroom full of rowdy students.

JACOB cont.

Some have called this a play about the American dream. Have you guys heard that expression before? Yeah? What is the American dream? How would you define it?

(waking students up)

Hello? Fritz! Melissa! Wake up. Xavier, you with me? Get your feet off the desk. X, what's your American dream? Yes yours, what is your personal American dream. An Escalade. Alright. What color? That's your dream, you telling me the color doesn't matter?

(Jacob listens)

Fair enough. Anybody else? What's your dream, Crystal? Money? How much? \$500? That's all?

JACOB cont.

(disciplines students)

Shaqwan. Latosha. Knock it off. Jennifer, that's quite an extensive text message, you got footnotes in there? I'm not going to ask you again.

(back to class)

So do we think that the American Dream has more or less always been the same or do you think it changes from year to year? What do you think it was in say...1949? Real different? Yeah?

(disciplining)

Excuse me. Excuse me! Gentleman! I'm sorry have we met? Are you new in here? What's your name? *I'm talking to you.* What is your name? My name's Mr. Clancy. You sure you're in the right room? Why don't you check your schedule. No no no no, take it out and check it. Show me. I'll wait. So you're supposed to be here? That's what it says? Oh, because the class where you sit in the back and talk the whole time, this is not that class. Hello?

(pointing)

*I am speaking to you.* We clear? This is the only warning I'm giving you.

(don't test me)

Nice to meet you.

Jacob shakes hands with the audience member he has been addressing.

JACOB cont.

(back to the rest of the class)

Reading Journals out.

(writing on the board)

What would Willy Lowman say? If you asked Willy Lowman about the American dream, what do you think he would say? Three paragraphs. Do it now or consider it homework.

Lights shift. The students and classroom are gone. Jacob turns back to us.

JACOB cont.

This was a rough day. There not always like this. Grades come out today, so- Well you saw how they were.

Cezar has reappeared on stage. Jacob looks over at him.

JACOB cont.

You could be one of my students...



Act 1 Scene 5

Back on the block, Cezar charges towards Jacob.

JACOB

*Hey, this is unacceptable behavior.*

Cezar is taken aback by Jacob's sudden boldness.

JACOB cont.

*Sir, you are way out of line.*

Cezar stares at Jacob.

JACOB

What do you think you're doing?

CEZAR

Who the fuck you talkin to?

JACOB

I'm talking to you. You see anyone else around?

(beat)

I'm sorry, I don't think we've been properly introduced.

Jacob extends his hand. Cezar looks at him Confused.

JACOB cont.

My name is Jacob.

Cezar does not shake his hand.

JACOB cont.

Can I help you?

CEZAR

Why you walked away from me for?

JACOB

Because, I'm going home.

CEZAR

We was talkin.

JACOB

Well, I was done speaking with you.

CEZAR

I wasn't.

JACOB

I'm sorry to hear that. But this is where I live and I need to go home now. Where are you going?

CEZAR

I'm goin to get that fuckin dollar.

JACOB

I think we've already been over this. That's not how you ask for things.

CEZAR

I ain't askin.

JACOB

What'd you say your name was?

CEZAR

I didn't.

JACOB

Why are you following me?

CEZAR

Why you walkin away from me?

JACOB

Because I live here.

CEZAR

Bus is that way, son.

JACOB

I'm not waiting for the bus.

CEZAR

So I guess you gonna give me that fuckin dollar then.

Cezar steps up and gets in Jacob's face.  
Jacob steps back.

JACOB  
You don't have to do this.

CEZAR  
Do what?

JACOB  
This.

CEZAR  
I ain't did nothing.

JACOB  
(beat)  
I'm not saying it's going to be me, but there are consequences to all of our actions. This isn't the way to go about this.

CEZAR  
My man, I ain't gone ask you again.

JACOB  
You have a choice here.

CEZAR  
You gotta choice.

Cezar creeps forward, ready to strike.

JACOB  
Okay, okay, alright, I'm going to give you a dollar.

CEZAR  
Yo it's about fuckin time.

Jacob digs in his pockets and fumbles with his wallet.

JACOB  
One dollar...

CEZAR  
Gimme that shit.

JACOB  
I'm giving you one dollar-

Let me see it-

CEZAR

One dollar-

JACOB

What else you got in there?

CEZAR

Jacob pulls out a dollar. Lights shift as Jacob starts to hold it out to Cezar in slow motion. Also in slow motion, Cezar reaches for Jacob's wallet. He gets a firm grip on it.

Jacob, holding on tight to his wallet, punches Cezar in the face. His hand stops right on Cezar's cheek. They both freeze.

Act 1 Scene 6

Jacob walks downstage as lights pull in on him.

JACOB

I'd like to preface this by saying, I've never actually been in a fight. When I was growing up fights weren't really the thing until junior high. Sure you had your occasional playground bullies that you might find yourself in a shoving match with after an emotional game of dodge ball, but for the most part violence was 95% shit talking and 5% slap boxing. In the sixth grade that all changed.

The sounds of a middle school can be heard.

JACOB cont.

Middle school was this lawless-badlands-training-ground for young gladiators. For us, the main events always played out in the downstairs boy's bathroom. There was a certain ceremony and ritual to these tests of manhood. It would start with two older boys selecting two younger boys that they would like to see fight. A garbage can would be wedged in the door handle locking us all in, a circle would be formed, and we little alpha hopefuls would do our best to hurt each other and not cry. But on my big day, something different happened...

Lights shift. We are in the downstairs middle school bathroom. Young Jacob steps up for the fight.

JACOB cont.

I had been selected to fight Bobby Condorf. A completely unfair match. We had gone to summer camp together and Bobby could do way more push-ups than me. He life guarded every summer and was practically a junior Olympic swimmer.

A toiled flushes.

JACOB cont.

As Bobby and I squared up my lower lip was wouldn't stop quivering. Like it knew it was about to get smashed. I took a deep breath and mentally prepared my body for the abuse it was about to receive, when out of nowhere, Nicole Johnson stepped forward and shouted-

In dookie braids, bamboo earrings, and Cross Colour overalls with one strap down, Nicole Johnson appears sucking on a pacifier.

NICOLE JOHNSON

Nah! Nah! Not that boy. Not that one.

(to Jacob)

Your names Jake?

JACOB

(swallows hard)

Yeah.

NICOLE JOHNSON

Don't have'm fight that kid! He ain't fightin. C'mere Jake.

Confused and scarded, Young Jacob walks  
over to Nicole.

NICOLE JOHNSON cont.

Jake ain't fightin nobody.

JACOB

(to Audience)

Let me tell you something about Nicole Johnson. Nicole Johnson came from a long line of fighters. Her dad was a killer. He was locked up for one such offense. Nicole wasn't no kick and run chick. She wasn't a hair puller or a scratcher. Nicole was a choker. That was her trademark move. She would choke you out without hesitation.

Nicole puts a protective arm around Jacob.  
Jacob looks up at her and smiles politely.

NICOLE JOHNSON

What grade you in?

JACOB

Sixth.

NICOLE JOHNSON

Who you got for homeroom?

JACOB

Miss Saint Augustine

NICOLE JOHNSON

Oh she a bitch, right?

JACOB

She's okay.

Leon in that class with you?  
NICOLE JOHNSON

Yeah.  
JACOB

You gotta girlfriend Jakey?  
NICOLE JOHNSON

Not yet.  
JACOB

NICOLE JOHNSON  
Nigga said *yet*, not *yet*, that's right Jakey, I gotta little cousin for you homey. Dag....it smell like piss in here.

(to another boy)  
Yeah no shit it's a bathroom, I'm sayen y'all need to aim ya little peepee's better or something, girls bathroom don't be stinkin like this. Not it don't. When you been in there? Pshh.

(to Jacob)  
You live in Shelter Hill?

JACOB  
Near there.

NICOLE JOHNSON  
I seen you. You play ball.

JACOB  
Mnhhmm.

NICOLE JOHNSON  
Y'all won City Park?

JACOB  
Not this year. Last year we did.

NICOLE JOHNSON  
You play point?

JACOB  
Off guard.

NICOLE JOHNSON  
You gotta work on them handles, J.

Jacob nods.

NICOLE JOHNSON cont.

Dag, lunch bout to be over, do it already! Get that boy over there, him by the door.  
(pointing)

Yeah him. He gon' fight.

A fight can be heard starting. Unimpressed,  
Nicole watches the boys scrap.

JACOB

To this day I still don't why, but Nicole became my protector. She was junior high royalty. No bathroom brawls for me. No getting pocket checked for lunch money. One time after school my friend Howie Attenborow snatched my hat as a joke and Nicole put Howie to sleep. He was unconscious and she still kept choking him. I had to tell her, "Nicole, it's cool. We was just playin."

Nicole looks down at Jacob and  
affectionately caresses his neck and chin  
with her index finger, before vanishing.

JACOB cont.

Short story long, I never learned to fight.

ARCADE VOICE

U.S.A.!



Act 1 Scene 7

Back on the street Cezar creeps forward, ready to strike. Street Fighter II music comes in softly.

JACOB

Okay, okay, alright, I'm going to give you a dollar.

CEZAR

Yo it's about fuckin time.

Jacob digs in his pockets and fumbles with his wallet. The music is getting louder.

JACOB

One dollar...

CEZAR

Gimme that shit.

JACOB

I'm giving you one dollar-

CEZAR

Let me see it-

JACOB

One dollar-

CEZAR

What else you got in there?

Jacob pulls out a dollar. Lights shift as Jacob starts to hold it out to Cezar in slow motion. Also in slow motion, Cezar reaches for Jacob's wallet. He gets a firm grip on it.

ARCADE VOICE

Round One. Fight!

Jacob, holding on tight to his wallet, punches Cezar in the face. His hand smashes right onto Cezar's cheek.

A 99-seconds time clock counts down. Jacob and Cezar begin to fight. The fight is realistic looking, sloppy and vicious. It is accompanied by Street Fighter II sound effects and music. Special attacks are announced as they are performed. We can see their energy go down as they take hits.

CEZAR

I don't wanna have to kill you, man!

Jacob does his best, but Cezar is clearly the better fighter. We hear Chun-Li's scream as Jacob goes down.

ARCADE VOICE

You lose!

Cezar grabs Jacob's wallet up off the ground.

JACOB

Hey!

Cezar pulls out the cash.

JACOB

Give that back!

Cezar throws the wallet in the air and runs off. The wallet spins in the air sending dozens of credit cards and I.D.'s flying in every direction.

Act 1 Scene 8

Jacob begins gathering his cards up. He is clearly shaken.

JACOB

I gotta few hits in. I wouldn't say I got my ass kicked. I wouldn't say, I won, or got the better of anything. Not by any stretch of the imagination. But I...I felt like I was pulling my punches a little. I didn't hit as hard as I could. I didn't want to hurt him. I mean, how much cash did I have. No more than twenty, thirty dollars. It's just money.

A cheerful Makeup Artist enters with a new costumes for Jacob. He holds up a few a t-shirts the same as the one Jacob has one.

MAKEUP ARTIST

Medium or large?

JACOB

Medium.

MAKEUP ARTIST

I distressed it on the sides, let me know if you want it looser in the neck.

JACOB

(to the Makeup Artist)

This is fine.

Jacob takes off his shirt and puts on the damaged one.

JACOB

(to audience)

I just wish it didn't happen here. Anywhere but here. I live here, you know? I have to walk down these streets everyday. It's one thing to get robbed, it's another thing when it happens right outside your door.

Makeup Artist holds up two different pairs of pants identical to the one's Jacob is wearing.

MAKEUP ARTIST

(holding up different pairs)

Cheese grader or sanded?

(making the decision for herself)

Sanded.

MAKEUP ARTIST

(laughing at the pair with holes in it)

These one's belong in Urban Outfitters.

Jacob puts on the sanded jeans.

JACOB

Every night getting off the train I'd expect to see him there waiting for me.

MAKEUP ARTIST

I'm assuming this wasn't just a standing punchy punchy kind of thing-

JACOB

My heart would be pounding by the top of the stairs.

MAKEUP ARTIST

More of knock down drag out rolling in the gutter-

JACOB

I couldn't unclench my fists, I'd be shaking with adrenaline, sweaty, ready...

MAKEUP ARTIST

Maybe we want to indicate more dragging and rubbing.

Makeup artist takes out a latex sponge and  
begins applying makeup to Jacob's face.

MAKEUP ARTIST

If it's fresh, we're going to see more reds, but since we're going for a passage of time so,  
I'm going to go with deeper purples....here.... maybe some yellowish tinge in there...

JACOB

It played over and over in my head. Every moment. And all I kept thinking was, why  
didn't I hit him harder. I could have hit him harder.

MAKEUP ARTIST

(to himself)

A light grey?

JACOB

Gray?

MAKEUP ARTIST

Shhh.

JACOB

I started doing push-ups again. I'd see his face, and imagine hitting it over and over. I was up to a thousand push-ups a night.

Makeup artist licks his finger to smear the makeup. Jacob now has a very realistic black eye.

JACOB cont.

I wanted to be able to break a jaw in one hit.

MAKEUP ARTIST

Some swelling on the cheek ...

JACOB

I even carried a knife for a few days. God I was afraid I'd accidentally pull it out or drop it at school. But the truth is, I could never really take it to that level. To scar someone for life or worse...How can you live with that kind of karmic debt on your hands? Does that make me soft?

MAKEUP ARTIST

Yes!

Jacob gives the Makeup Artist a look for interrupting his monologue.

MAKEUP ARTIST cont.

Sorry.

JACOB

So I'm soft. There's worse things to be.

MAKEUP ARTIST

Turn please.

*Have You Seen Her Face* by the Chi-Lites begins to play.

JACOB

I started seeing him everywhere.

MAKEUP ARTIST

Let's get some broken blood vessels...over here...

JACOB

The hallways at school. On the train. Around every corner, over my shoulder, just out of sight.

MAKEUP ARTIST

A few superficial cuts on the lip...

JACOB

In my dreams. Waking and sleeping. But I had survived. I got beat up and robbed. I am an adult. I am a man. I am a teacher. And I got beat up and robbed.

MAKEUP ARTIST

Done and done. Will that do it?

Makeup Artist holds up a mirror. Jacob looks at his new mess of a face.

JACOB

I had to teach with this face.

MAKEUP ARTIST

Poor thing.

Satisfied the Makeup Artist exits. Nervous and looking over his shoulder, Jacob goes for a walk.

MUSIC cont.

A month ago today  
I was happy as a lark  
I go for walks now  
To the movies, or to the park

Still scared, Jacob takes a seat on a bench.

MUSIC cont.

I have a seat on the same old bench  
To watch the children play  
Tomorrow's their future  
But for me it's just another day

Growing bored, Jacob stands and heads off.

MUSIC cont.

They all gather □round me  
They seem to know my name  
We laugh and play around  
But it still doesn't ease my pain

Cautiously, Jacob continues on.

MUSIC cont.

I can't hide from a memory  
Though day after day I try  
I keep sayin'  
She'll be back she'll be back

Suddenly, Cezar appears on stage. Jacob  
spins around to face him, but Cezar is gone.

MUSIC cont.

Oh, I see her face everywhere I go  
On the street and even at the picture show  
Have you seen her  
Tell me have you seen her

Jacob continues to be haunted by Cezar.

MUSIC cont.

Oh, I hear her voice as the cold winds blow  
In the sweet music on my radio  
Have you seen her  
Tell me have you seen her

Jacob and Cezar dance on roller skates.

MUSIC cont.

Why, oh, why

Did she have to leave and go away

Oh...oh...oh...oh...oh...

I've been used to havin' someone to lean on

And I'm lost, baby I'm lost...



Act 1 Scene 9

Again, Jacob is alone.

JACOB

It was a week before I felt comfortable leaving my apartment. Walking around my neighborhood. To go to the store. To do my laundry.

A neighborhood Laundromat. The hum of washing machines. Jacob loads his laundry.

JACOB cont.

I had just put in a load when I glanced out the window and there he was, standing right on that same corner. *My corner*. With two older corner boys. Bigger. Meaner looking. What is all this? You got my money. You stretched out one of my favorite shirts? What do you want now? Is this just a coincidence? Do you just happen to be hanging out on my block?

(beat)

Maybe he just wants to talk.

IMAGINARY CEZAR VOICE

Hey man, I never got to say, it was really swell taking your money the other night. For real, I don't usually say this, but you did good, kid. You passed the test, Mr. Teacher man. You got alotta heart. You're in our posse now. We got your back, Mister.

JACOB

Maybe he's forgotten all about last week. Who knows what kinds shit the kid gets into on a daily basis. I could just walk by like nothing. What's the worst that could happen?

Jacob imagines the outcome.

IMAGINARY CEZAR VOICE

That's the muffucka right there!

OTHER VOICES

Who him?

That nigga?

Yo, grab him grab him-

JACOB

Groups of young men are dangerously effective at hyping each other to do things. I could walk away from my apartment, head up Johnson or McKibbin and come get back to on Broadway. Or take the bus back. Is this how it's gonna be now?

JACOB

Is it better to test the water during the day, see what these guys want when there's still people on the street? People to whom I could call out to, for help if need be. Why should I have to test anything? What if I run into these guys at night?

(looking out the window)

Why are you on my corner? Go away. I live here. Do you live here? Then go rob people somewhere else. Don't shit where you eat. What the hell am I supposed to do?

Carrying a valise and an umbrella, Uncle Ben from *Death of a Salesman* enters.

UNCLE BEN

So this is Brooklyn, eh?

JACOB

Oh Ben, what do I do?

UNCLE BEN

I must make a train, Jacob. There are several properties I'm looking at in Alaska.

JACOB

(to audience)

If I'd gone with him to Alaska that time, everything would've been totally different.

UNCLE BEN

Opportunity is tremendous in Alaska, Jacob. Surprised you're not up there.

Uncle Ben glances at his watch.

UNCLE BEN cont.

I have only a few minutes.

JACOB

What's the answer, Ben?

UNCLE BEN

You've a new continent at your doorstep, Jacob. Get out of these cities, they're full of talk and time payments and courts of law. Screw on your fists you can fight for a fortune up there.

Uncle Ben pounds his stomach.

UNCLE BEN cont.

Hit that boy, hard as you can.

JACOB

Okay.

Jacob and Uncle Ben spar. Uncle Ben trips him and holds his umbrella in his eye

JACOB

Gee!

Uncle Ben helps Jacob up off the ground.

JACOB cont.

Ben, can't we talk?

UNCLE BEN

Jacob, it's half past eight! I'll be late for my train.

JACOB

Ben, am I right? Don't you think I'm right? I value your advice.

UNCLE BEN

Jacob, when I was seventeen. I walked into the jungle, and when I was twenty-one I walked out.

(he laughs)

And by god I was rich.

JACOB

But, how did you do it?

UNCLE BEN

Haven't the time, Jacob.

Uncle Ben starts to walk away.

JACOB

Wait. What is the answer?

UNCLE BEN

Goodbye, Jacob.

JACOB

What should I do?

UNCLE BEN

I've got to go.

JACOB

I've got to talk to you!

UNCLE BEN

Never fight fair with a stranger boy. You'll never get out of the jungle that way.

Uncle Ben vanishes. Jacob goes back to the window and looks out at the young men on the corner. Jacob pulls out his cell phone, opens it and dials 9-1-1.

JACOB cont.

Fuck this shit.

(into phone)

Yes I'd like to report a crime. Robbery. I was mugged last week and I see the guy right- Yes- I see the guy who did it right now. A Laundromat. Graham and Montrose. Center of the block- I'm looking at him across the street. The intersection- in front of Dominos Pizza. I'd say 5'9", average build. Hispanic male. He's wearing jeans, a red hoodie. Cornrows. Standing with three other men. Yes, I can wait. Okay.

Jacob hangs up the phone. I police siren is heard in the distance. It grows louder.

JACOB cont.

And just like that, seven cop cars converge on the scene. All of the corner boys are thrown against the wall. Searched. And they're pulling out drugs, and they're pulling out weapons. Knives. Box-cutters. I just had four dudes from the neighborhood arrested half a block from my apartment. I live here.

Jacob squints out the window.

JACOB cont.

Is that even him???

Act 1 Scene 10

A strobe light comes on. Cezar has no facial features; skin covers his entire face. His words are prerecorded and exactly the same as before. All actions are repeated.

JACOB

Okay, okay, alright, I'm going to give you a dollar.

CEZAR

Yo it's about fuckin time.

JACOB

One dollar...

CEZAR

Gimme that shit.

JACOB

I'm giving you one dollar-

CEZAR

Let me see it-

JACOB

One dollar-

CEZAR

What else you got in there?

The actions of the fight between Jacob and Cezar is repeated.

CEZAR

I don't wanna have to kill you, man!

Cezar grabs Jacob's wallet up off the ground.

JACOB

Hey!

Cezar pulls out the cash.

JACOB cont.

Give that to back!

Cezar throws the wallet in the air and runs off. The wallet spins in the air sending dozens of credit cards and I.D.'s flying in every direction.

Act 1 Scene 11

Police precinct. Jacob speaks with Officer Lopez.

JACOB

They all saw me!

OFFICER LOPEZ

Mr. Clancy-

JACOB

You walked me right past them!

OFFICER LOPEZ

There's people being escorted around here all the time.

JACOB

The kid, he saw me, his friends know I called the police on them.

OFFICER LOPEZ

I hope that's not the case.

JACOB

You hope?

OFFICER LOPEZ

Yeah, that's probably not so good.

JACOB

Not so good?!

OFFICER LOPEZ

It shouldn't have happened.

JACOB

Well it did!

OFFICER LOPEZ

I apologize for that.

JACOB

I called about one kid! One! I gave you a description of him.

OFFICER LOPEZ

A number of them fit that description.

JACOB  
A red hoodie?

OFFICER LOPEZ  
Just being safe.

JACOB  
You locked up my whole block!

OFFICER LOPEZ  
Would you like to get a restraining order on these guys?

JACOB  
I don't know these guys!

OFFICER LOPEZ  
I'm going to give you all their information. The district attorney should be calling you tomorrow. Do you want a restraining order?

JACOB  
I don't know. I don't know anything.

OFFICER LOPEZ  
Listen, we average, six or seven robberies every night in the 10 block radius of where you live. You did good. We made an arrest. That's a good thing.

JACOB  
Did you see the kid?

OFFICER LOPEZ  
Did I see which kid?

JACOB  
The one in the red sweatshirt. The one I called about.

OFFICER LOPEZ  
Yes, I was the arresting officer. Cezar Rodriguez.

JACOB  
How's his, did his face look hurt at all?

OFFICER LOPEZ  
Hurt?



JACOB

We fought a little. Did it look like I- Could you tell he'd been in a fight.

OFFICER LOPEZ

He looks fine to me.

JACOB

Nothing on his face?

OFFICER LOPEZ

No.

JACOB

So what happens now?

OFFICER LOPEZ

Someone from the D.A.'s office should be giving you a call soon. If we'd picked him next week we could send him right to Rikers. He's just a few days shy of his 17<sup>th</sup> birthday. But don't worry, he's on his way up to Spafford. I could tell ya that's not a nice place.

JACOB

He's sixteen?

OFFICER LOPEZ

None of these other guys were minors.

JACOB

Do I need to pick him out of a lineup or something?

OFFICER LOPEZ

No, you I.D.'d him on the street.

JACOB

So, no line up?

OFFICER LOPEZ

That's not necessary.

JACOB

What if I'd like one.

OFFICER LOPEZ

What for?

JACOB  
To make sure it's him.

OFFICER LOPEZ  
It is him. You I.D.'d him when you called.

JACOB  
What if that's not him?

OFFICER LOPEZ  
What if what?

JACOB  
What if you got the wrong guy?

OFFICER LOPEZ  
Did we arrest the person you pointed out?

JACOB  
Yes.

OFFICER LOPEZ  
Well then that's the right guy.

JACOB  
What if it's just someone that looks similar?

OFFICER LOPEZ  
What are you telling me?

JACOB  
I'm telling you what I'm telling you. I want to be sure it's the right kid.

OFFICER LOPEZ  
Are you unsure?

JACOB  
No, yes, I-

OFFICER LOPEZ  
Were you unsure when you placed the 9-1-1 call?

JACOB  
No.

OFFICER LOPEZ

At what point did you become unsure.

JACOB

I don't. It looks like him, but, maybe it's not.

OFFICER LOPEZ

The kids got two priors. The other two are dealers in the neighborhood.

JACOB

But that doesn't make it more or less likely to be him.

OFFICER LOPEZ

Jacob, how old are you?

JACOB

Twenty six.

OFFICER LOPEZ

Let me tell you something. My son is 19. He just bought a t-shirt that says crack is back. I had to break the news to him. Crack never went away.

JACOB

Okay.

OFFICER LOPEZ

Where are you from, Jacob?

JACOB

Where do I live?

OFFICER LOPEZ

No, where did you grow up?

JACOB

New York.

OFFICER LOPEZ

Yeah, where?

JACOB

Oswego.

OFFICER LOPEZ

Where is that?

JACOB

Up state.

OFFICER LOPEZ

I grew up in Ingersoll Houses, you know where that is?

JACOB

No.

OFFICER LOPEZ

It's in Fort Green. You ever been to the projects, Jacob?

JACOB

No.

OFFICER LOPEZ

Well. You pretty much know you're in the projects when there's piss in the elevator. I had to smell that shit everyday. My mom and my sister had to smell that shit everyday. Sometimes they'd piss right in front of me. I'd have to lift my foot up to avoid a hot stream of urine. Pretty nasty, right?

Jacob nods.

OFFICER LOPEZ cont.

When I graduated the academy I worked for the Housing Authority. First thing I did, was bust one of these guys. I put his face down in it when I cuffed him, like how you train a puppy. And I told him, "Don't do this anymore. It's fuckin nasty." Nothing wrong with telling these guys not to do what they shouldn't a been doing in the first place.

Officer Lopez holds up the arrest report.

OFFICER LOPEZ

I'll rip this up right now. It's your call.

Jacob considers this.

OFFICER LOPEZ cont.

You I.D'd him at the Laundromat.

JACOB

(remembering)

My laundry.

OFFICER LOPEZ

What's it gonna be?

JACOB

I need to go.

OFFICER LOPEZ

You're free to go whenever you want.

Officer Lopez is gone.

JACOB cont.

Sure enough the district attorney called me up. Cezar Rodriguez was tried as an adult for aggravated assault. I didn't even have to appear in court. He is currently serving out a 4 year sentence upstate. Not far from where I grew up actually.

(beat)

I will take from Cezar his late teens and early 20's, because he took from me my sense of security. And I'd like sleep soundly.

(beat)

Do you remember what you were doing from the age of 17 to 21? I can't remember a whole lot, but I can tell you I wasn't robbing people. I also had an ample supply of bus fair.

(beat)

I used to go to police brutality protests and shout at Giuliani. Now I live in a neighborhood I never would have set foot in.

(beat)

A few weeks after the trial my apartment was broken into. They trashed the place, stole my roommate's new laptop and my saxophone. The only thing of value I owned. They ate my snickers ice cream bars. Left the wrappers on the counter.

A saxophone can be heard playing a sad blues song.

JACOB cont.

Tomorrow I will attend my student's graduation. They celebrate whenever I'm sick, but if I'm not there when they walk, they'll never forgive me. It's unforgivable.

(beat)

Not all my seniors are graduating this year. But even if they did, you still might find one of them following you home late at night, asking for a dollar.

(beat)

Get home safe.

Jacob looks out silently. Eventually he starts to exit.

Cezar appears playing the saxophone. Jacob stops in front of Cezar and watches him play.

Jacob pulls out a dollar. He drops the dollar  
in Cezar's open saxophone case.

Cezar stops playing and looks at Jacob.  
Jacob looks at Cezar.

They stare at one another for along time,  
almost forever.

END OF PLAY

Rivers of January  
By Ben Snyder

## CHARACTERS

RAVI: A charismatic, driven, social entrepreneur, Ravi is 27, from Paterson, New Jersey. (South Asian or Middle Eastern – first generation American)

SILAS: A melancholy, dedicated, high school history teacher, Silas is 26, from Mount Vernon, New York. (Biracial; African-American and white)

NATE: A neurotic, clever, and moderately successful documentary filmmaker, Nate is 26, from Bay Ridge, Brooklyn. (White, Jewish)

## SETTING

Present day \*Rio de Janeiro, Brazil. December 29<sup>th</sup> – December 31<sup>st</sup>.

\**Rio de Janeiro* literally means River of January, named by the Portuguese who arrived in the region January 1, 1502.



Act 1 Scene 1

At Rise: Lights up on a plush beachside apartment. Two large suitcases sit by a leather couch. Silas, in winter clothes, unpacks one of the bags. He carefully unfolds a dress shirt and drapes it over a chair. Ravi, wearing shorts, a t-shirt, and sandals, prepares some mixed drinks.

RAVI

Take off some clothes and let's get outa here.

SILAS

How do you afford this place?

RAVI

I don't.

SILAS

I can kick you down some cash for staying here if-

RAVI

(waving this idea away)

Nah nah nah.

Ravi hands Silas a drink.

SILAS

What's this?

RAVI

Caipirinha. I made it extra sweet for you. I know you like them fruity drinks.

SILAS

I do like fruity drinks. Not bad.

RAVI

You wanna go get some food or something?

SILAS

I should probably crash out. I need to stop by the university in the morning.

RAVI

What you wanna do this week?

SILAS

You tell me. You ready to play tour guide?

RAVI

*I am so finkin ready yo- no one visits me. Everyone says they're comin down an then they don't come.*

SILAS

I really wanna check out your community center.

RAVI

We're closed for the holidays, but I can take you up after New Years.

Silas unzips a suitcase on wheels. It is full of large cardboard box packages.

SILAS

Does this look shady to you?

RAVI

I don't think so.

Silas removes the packages placing them on a coffee table.

SILAS

I think it looks a lil suspect.

RAVI

Anyone stress you about it?

SILAS

No, but, you know what they ask you at check in 'Did you pack your own bags? Did anyone give you anything to carry?' This is word for word what they mean; I was like, *as a matter a fact yes, someone did ask me to carry something.*

RAVI

You said that?

SILAS

Of course not.

Ravi takes the packages and puts them off to the side.

RAVI

(let's stop talking about that)

Thanks for bringin these out.

SILAS

You need help taking them up to the center?

RAVI

I think I can manage. A, check this out. Best part of the apartment.

Ravi leads Silas out onto a balcony.

SILAS

(checking out the view)

Nice.

(looking down below)

Is that the ocean?

RAVI

Do you realize at this very second, huddled masses are standing around subway platforms, peeking out from under puffy black winter coat hoods, lookin all serious like they on the way to some funeral in Antarctica-

SILAS

Don't remind me-

RAVI

And we're out here. I'm in a T-shirt, and I'm hot, kid-

SILAS

What are all those lights?

RAVI

That's some informal housing.

SILAS

Favelas?

RAVI

A small favela- That's over in *Leme*.

SILAS

(repeating)

Leme-

RAVI

(pointing)

So this beach, and the neighborhood here, this is *Copacabana*. Yo you see that little ridge out there, where the waves are crashing?

SILAS

Mmmhmm.

RAVI

Beyond that, that's where *Ipanema* starts, you know that song

(to the melody of *The Girl From Ipanema*)

Daa da dun dun, daada da dun-dun- that's probably my favorite beach out here. So this whole part of the city is *Zona Sul*, South Zone. You remember going through a long ass tunnel coming out the airport?

SILAS

Yeah.

RAVI

You were up in *Zona Norte*. North Zone. That's where the center's at. The city controls this side of the hill more or less. You been reading the news at all?

SILAS

About the police activity?

RAVI

Yeah, they're tryna pacify the South Zone to get ready for the Olympics. Which really just pushes all the drug dealers up north. Shit's kind of a mess right now.

Ravi heads back inside and Silas follows.  
Silas continues to unpack his bags.

SILAS

How far are we from the university?

RAVI

Not far. It's up by Sugar Loaf, I can take you. What time you gotta be there?

SILAS

9:30. You need to teach me some Portuguese.

RAVI

At my yoga studio they do Portuguese classes on the weekends.

SILAS

Shut the fuck up, you do yoga?

Yeah. So?

RAVI

No, that's, that's great-

SILAS

Actually it is, you should come sit in on a class. My mom took a class when she was out here.

RAVI

How is your mom?

SILAS

She's good. She and Chaiten came out last month.

RAVI

How's he doin'?

SILAS

Good. Lookin all grown. Shaving. He's a hairy little fucker.

RAVI

What's he in like high school now?

SILAS

First year of college, bro-

RAVI

Jesus-

SILAS

Playin ball too. D3, but still-

RAVI

Did I sleep through a decade? How long have you been out here?

SILAS

Year and some change.

RAVI

What's it been like for you?

SILAS

Livin here?

RAVI

SILAS

Yeah.

RAVI

I was just talking to my cousin bout that. I was expecting all this culture shock, comin from Wall Street, to *no street*. But I mean, you know where I grew up.

SILAS

Yeah.

RAVI

I came from nothing, or the first world equivalent of nothing. So for me, acting like a rich kid up in N.Y. was about as foreign as it gets. Takin this job out here, in some ways, was like comin home. And the funny thing of it is, for the first time in my life I'm an *American* to everyone I meet. But you know how when you're abroad and you tell people you're from New York, it's like you're not really an American, like New York is its own country. You know what I mean?

SILAS

But you're from Jersey.

RAVI

Yo!- That's-, Son- See that's exactly what I love about this city, Sigh. That New Yorker shit was so tired to me man. In New York, I could be up in New York for a thousand years and mufuckers would still come out their face on some *born-an-raised born-an-raised* bullshit. *You* know what I'm talkin about.

SILAS

I got New York pride.

RAVI

Yeah, but you're not from the city.

SILAS

Yes I am.

RAVI

Upstate don't count.

SILAS

Mount Vernon isn't upstate.

RAVI

Anything north of Yankee Stadium's upstate-

SILAS

Mount Vernon isn't-

RAVI

Yo, I seen grown ass adults puttin 'native New Yorker' down on their resume like it's a credential for something. I had this ex from Queens who would throw these New Yorker Only parties uptown. They had this little interrogation room before you got inside where they grill you on what school you went to what block you grew up on if you ever rode the double R. What the fuck is a double R?

SILAS

You tried to get in didn't you?

RAVI

That's really not relevant to what I'm saying. On a fundamental level, New York is a city that rejects you.

(quick beat)

Now Rio,

(*Portuguese accent*)

*Rio de Janeiro* on the other hand. Also a beautiful ugly rugged ass city - fuck around out here you find out real quick what this city's about. But unlike

(*heavy New York accent*)

*New York*, this's a city with natives, not *nativism*, you feel me? Rio's a city that says, if you come here, live here, fall in line with the lifestyle, then you too are a *Carioca*; you're a local. *This is a city that claims you.*

SILAS

I see you've put a lot of thought into this.

RAVI

It's a beautiful thing.

SILAS

So you're a

(karaoke)

Carioca now?

RAVI

(correct pronunciation)

*Carioca*. Yes. I am.

SILAS

Cool. Great. But you're still from Jersey.

RAVI

*Vai se fuder*. (Go fuck yourself.)

Yeah? What's that mean? SILAS

That you're a jerk. RAVI

You fluent? SILAS

I know some curse words. RAVI

But you can talk to people? SILAS

I get by. RAVI

How long it take you? SILAS

I dunno. I had did this language intensive when I got here, but, having a girlfriend who didn't speak English really accelerated the process- RAVI

Who's your girlfriend? SILAS

We're not really- RAVIS

She Brazilian? SILAS

Yeah. She was a student up at the center- RAVI

A student? SILAS

In the *adult* program- RAVI

You dated a student? SILAS



RAVI

We have job training classes for adults on the weekends and she had taken a few. We broke up last month. But yeah, she taught me most of what I know.

SILAS

I just need some basic phrases.

RAVI

How long you staying for again?

SILAS

I leave on the 5<sup>th</sup>, but I might extend it.

RAVI

You don't gotta be back for work?

SILAS

I don't know.

RAVI

You're not teaching?

SILAS

Not at the moment.

RAVI

Since when?

SILAS

Oh, since around mid October.

RAVI

You quit?

SILAS

Not exactly.

RAVI

You got fired?

SILAS

(I don't want to answer that question)

I'm not teaching right now.

RAVI

Why don't you come teach English up at the center?

SILAS

You serious?

RAVI

Dude, that would actually be perfect. I'm short staffed right now.

SILAS

I'm not certified for ESL.

RAVI

You think anyone out here is?

SILAS

I did substitute a few times, it's something I enjoy teaching.

RAVI

So teach it.

SILAS

Are you offering me a job?

RAVI

Yes. I can do that. Would you like a job?

SILAS

I'd love a job. Don't fuck with me.

RAVI

I'm not fuckin with you. I would be honored to have you.

SILAS

We'll need to talk more about this-

RAVI

No, obviously-

SILAS

I have been thinking about working abroad.

RAVI

Just let me know when you wanna start. Get your mom to hook us up with some funding.

What?  
SILAS

Huh?  
RAVI

What you say?  
SILAS

No, I was just saying if your mom still works at the Ford Foundation- she still works there?  
RAVI

She does.  
SILAS  
(what are you getting at?)

I'm sayen...  
RAVI

What are you saying?  
SILAS

That's the spot for international ed projects, right?  
RAVI

I was actually thinking of applying for a Fulbright.  
SILAS

Oh.  
RAVI

Toying with the idea.  
SILAS

Out here?  
RAVI

Yeah.  
SILAS

That would be incredible.  
RAVI

It's pretty competitive, so-  
SILAS

RAVI

So what? You'd be perfect. You got the jaw structure of an ambassador.

SILAS

That's why I'm going to the university tomorrow. I'm meeting with Dr. Ligeiro, you heard of him?

RAVI

No.

SILAS

He's an Afro-Brazilian Studies professor. I'm trying to get a letter of affiliation from him for my application.

RAVI

What sort a project you proposing?

SILAS

Kind of what you were saying about how Rio absorbs people- Something about the construction of race in Brazil- Maybe something with poetry- I'm still tryna figure it out.

RAVI

You been writin'?

SILAS

I'm getting back into it.

RAVI

I know some kids on Fulbrights out here.

SILAS

Really.

RAVI

Yeah, you should talk to them.

SILAS

That would be great.

RAVI

Yo you should really talk to Nate, he'll be here tomorrow.

SILAS

Nate?

RAVI  
Yeah, you know he did that Fulbright in Ecuador a few years after we graduated.

SILAS  
Nate's coming?

RAVI  
Yeah.

SILAS  
Why is this the first I'm hearing about this?

RAVI  
Awww, man-

SILAS  
You know I don't really fuck with Nate.

RAVI  
C'mon-

SILAS  
He stayin here?

RAVI  
Yeah-

SILAS  
I'll check into a hostel.

RAVI  
Why would you do that?

SILAS  
I just told you why.

RAVI  
C'mon Sigh, don't be like that.

SILAS  
Rav, why would I wanna spend my week in Rio with some fuckin hipster?

RAVI  
He's not-

SILAS  
He is the quintessential hipster.

RAVI  
But somehow it works for him.

SILAS  
I really wanted to see you, man.

RAVI  
So see me then-

SILAS  
Anywhere you go with dude it's gonna be like here comes Captain America.

RAVI  
He could pass. That's the beauty of this place. Anyone could pass.

SILAS  
I really don't feel that guy. I just wish you had told me he was coming.

RAVI  
Maybe it's time to squash that shit. It's New Years. For real. Grudges are so last year.  
(beat)  
This is the high season, you're not gonna find anything in a hostel.

SILAS  
Can you take me to the university in the morning?

RAVI  
Yes.

SILAS  
Great.

RAVI  
No- What time?

SILAS  
9:30.

RAVI  
I should be here when Nate gets in. But it's real easy, I'll show you the bus.

SILAS  
(not fine)

Fine.

Silas walks out onto the balcony. After a moment Ravi follows him out.

RAVI  
I think New Years is my favorite time out here. You gonna dig this shit. Everyone wears white and goes down to the water. People cover the beach with flowers, offerings for *Yemanjá*. It's like the whole country practices *Candomblé* on New Years. Then there's fireworks and you dance til sunrise.  
(quick beat)  
It's really good to see you, Sigh.

SILAS  
It's good to see you too.

RAVI  
(sincere)  
How you been?

SILAS  
It's been a interesting year.

RAVI  
You're tellin me.

SILAS  
Did I tell you I met my father?

RAVI  
No.

SILAS  
Yeah. I found him on Facebook. This is such a bugged out world.

RAVI  
You friended him?

SILAS  
I did. We are officially friends. I've had a lot of down time these past few months.

Fireworks pop in the distance. Silas and Ravi look over at them.

SILAS cont.

I drove out to Philly and we met for coffee.

RAVI

What was it like to meet him?

SILAS

Really awkward.

RAVI

I bet.

SILAS

At one point he asked me if I wanted to hit him. I honestly couldn't tell you if he was joking or not.

RAVI

Did you hit him?

SILAS

I thought about it.

RAVI

And?

SILAS

I'm still thinking about it. I was looking at him thinking 'How is this old white man my father? How are we even related? Will I be an old white man when I grow up?' When I told him I was coming out here he got all excited. He does hardwood floors and apparently he works with Brazilian cherry wood a lot. He says to me, 'Lots of people like *you* in Brazil.' What do you say to that?

RAVI

I dunno.

SILAS

He's right though, right? Lot's of people like me out here? All sorts a mixed up backgrounds.

RAVI

Most multiracial spot on the planet.

SILAS

See that's what I wanna study.

More fireworks pop.



SILAS cont.

They do the fireworks before New Years?

RAVI

In the hills it's more of a year round occurrence. They're like smoke signals...

SILAS

That's pretty festive.

RAVI

(reading the fireworks)

Police are heading into the Favela. Be some gun play tonight. *Onde tem fumaça tem fogo-* (where there is smoke there is fire.) There's a war going on. You wanna go swimming?

SILAS

Now?

RAVI

Why not?

SILAS

Is that safe?

RAVI

Not really.

Silas shakes his head and goes back inside.  
Ravi studies the fireworks in the distance.

Act 1 Scene 2

Inside the apartment, early afternoon, the next day. Nate has recently arrived from the airport. He is hot and sweaty and pulls off layers of clothes. His bags are on the floor. Ravi stands beside him

NATE

He smacked me!

RAVI

He put his hands on you?

NATE

Yes! That's what I'm telling you.

RAVI

Where he'd hit you?

NATE

My face! Right in my face!

RAVI

It doesn't look swollen-

NATE

No cuz it was right here-

Nate indicates with his hand.

RAVI

And they'd already seen your passport and tourist visa?

NATE

They didn't give a fuck. I said call my consulate right now or let me go-

RAVI

And then he slapped you?

NATE

Yeah- like half way between a slap and push.

RAVI  
(mush = push with an M)

A mush?

NATE  
Yes exactly, he mushed me.

RAVI  
The immigration officer mushed you?

NATE  
Yes! Are they allowed to touch you like that?

RAVI  
Where are the packages?

NATE  
Is that legal?

RAVI  
Laws are more interpretive out here-

NATE  
Rav, I'm tellin you, I was real close to snuffin this guy.

RAVI  
You made a wise choice-

NATE  
He ruined my whole trip-

RAVI  
Nah-

NATE  
Look at me I'm still shakin-

RAVI  
Where are the packages-

NATE  
I been lookin forward to this trip for months. You know I *been had* a fucked up winter.

RAVI  
I know.

NATE

Now this...This the only thing I had to look forward to. I never take vacations. Bought a language CD an everything.

(bad accent)

*Oi João. Tudo bom-Tudo bem?* But THIS. This was very unwelcoming, Rav.

RAVI

Sorry bout that.

NATE

Really not cool, man.

RAVI

I apologize.

NATE

What were you thinkin, B?

RAVI

It's a random search, I didn't think the light would go off on you.

NATE

But you knew it was a possibility-

RAVI

A very slim possibility- I didn't wanna freak you out.

NATE

You didn't wanna freak me out? How'm I supposed to react when two big ass airport security officers pull me outa line and drag me to some back room-

RAVI

It's like a lottery- it never happens-

NATE

Yeah well it happened. An my head's spinnin on some BBC reports on disappeared peoples, black market body parts trade-

RAVI

That's more Sao Paulo steez-

NATE

dictatorships, dirty wars-

RAVI

That's Argentina, dude-

NATE

You gave me no heads up at all! What the fuck, Rav.

RAVI

What I thought, which in retrospect was clearly not the best move, was it's better not to make a liar out of you. You were properly outraged, like any good American would have been, and they let you go.

NATE

The fuck was in those packages?

RAVI

Did they open them up?

NATE

I dunno.

RAVI

What you mean you don't know?

NATE

They wouldn't tell me shit.

RAVI

Where are they?

NATE

They fucking confiscated them-

RAVI

They took them?

NATE

Were you listening to me at all?

RAVI

They let *you* go and didn't give em back?

NATE

No Rav. And I didn't ask for em.

RAVI

Did they say why they were taking them?

NATE

No.

RAVI

Did they say what they were going to do with them?

NATE

They didn't tell me shit, other than threaten to deport me. They locked me in an office for two hours and then they told me to fuck off.

RAVI

Did you get the name of the guys you were dealing with.

NATE

No.

RAVI

Do you have copy of your itinerary?

NATE

What was in those packages, Rav?

RAVI

Give me your itinerary.

NATE

Are you gonna tell me what the fuck is going on?

RAVI

*Give me your itinerary!*

Nate gives Ravi his itinerary. Ravi takes out his cell phone and places a call.

RAVI

(into phone)

*Oi, Fernando. Temos uma situação. Tinha um problema com a remessa. Eles foram tomados. No aeroporto. Alguns horas atrás.*

(reading the itinerary)

*O voo de TAM número seis seis zero oito que. Chegado de Nova Iorque as sete e meia. Eles têm todo o colocou em caixa que acaba de vir em. Tá bom.* (Hello, Fernando. We have a situation. There was a problem with the shipment. They have been taken. At the airport. A few hours ago. TAM flight number six six zero eight. Arrived from New York at 7:30. They have all the boxes that just came in. Okay)

Ravi ends the call.

NATE  
(beat)  
Ravi.  
(beat)  
What did you have me bring out here?  
  
RAVI  
Things for the center.  
  
NATE  
Yeah, what kind of things?  
  
RAVI  
School supplies.  
  
NATE  
That's not very specific.  
(beat)  
You better fuckin tell me something bro.  
  
RAVI  
(beat)  
You ever heard of Favela tours?  
  
NATE  
No.  
  
RAVI  
They're bus tours for tourists to drive through the hood and look out the window at poor people. I set up a program where tourists can come up and volunteer at the center. Certain individuals felt like I was taking business away from their bus tours so I'm being taxed, only they don't want money, they want items brought into the country for them-  
  
NATE  
Are you fucking kidding me?!

RAVI  
Nothing illegal-

NATE  
You had me smuggle-

RAVI  
It's only illegal for resale.

Was it for resale?

NATE

There's no way to prove that.

RAVI

You are fuckin unbelievable.

NATE

Sorry about the mix up at the airport.

RAVI

There was no mix up. I carried something for you that customs didn't want me entering the country with. Seems pretty straightforward to me.

NATE

They let you go, didn't they?

RAVI

And what if they hadn't?

NATE

Would you mind not mentioning this to Silas?

RAVI

I wouldn't know what to mention.

NATE

He wouldn't be so cool with it.

RAVI

Yeah, I'm not so cool with it if you haven't noticed.

NATE

I get that.

RAVI

Do you?

NATE

Yes. I do.

RAVI

Really?

NATE



RAVI

I made commitments to families that don't have running water. What do you want me to do?

NATE

Just show me the fuckin beach.

RAVI

I take full responsibility for what happened this morning. And I'm gonna make it up to you. But you made it. You're here. So enjoy it. Take a breath with me.

NATE

What.

RAVI

Roll with me for a second. Just inhale...

(inhaling)

One....two....Will you do it with me?

NATE

What the fuck are you talking about?

RAVI

Just breathe in with me. One....Two...

Annoyed, Nate breathes.

RAVI cont.

Three...and exhale...one...two...just breathe it out. Good. Be here now.

(putting his arm around Nate)

This is an amazing city. You are an amazing person-

NATE

Arigh dude-

RAVI

No for real. That film you did about those street kids in Ecuador-

NATE

Guatemala-

RAVI

Guatemala, that was a life changing documentary-

I don't know about all that-

NATE

I do. It changed my life.

RAVI

And failed to get distribution.

NATE

I'm really glad you came. I feel blessed to have you as my friend-

RAVI

Aright-

NATE

I love you.

RAVI

Aright man.

NATE

I know that makes you uncomfortable but I really don't give a fuck. Life's too short.

RAVI

Yeah, carpe diem, the sun's setting, Rav.

NATE

The sun is not setting. It's rising.

RAVI

Where's your bathroom?

NATE

First door on the right.

RAVI

Nate pulls a swimsuit out of his bag and heads to the bathroom.

RAVI cont.

How's the documentary?

NATE

Cancelled.

Thought it was postponed. RAVI

It was, now it's cancelled. NATE

Nate closes the door to the bathroom. Ravi  
anxiously checks his cell phone.

Nate comes out of the bathroom wearing his  
swimming trunks.

So you and Janelle really broke up? RAVI

Yeah. (sad) NATE

How's that goin? RAVI

Is what it is. NATE  
(beat)  
Silas get in?

He got in last night. RAVI

Can't wait to see me, right? NATE

I dunno. RAVI

What did he say when you told him I was coming? NATE

Not much. He's applying for a Fulbright I told him he should talk to you. RAVI

And what he say? NATE

RAVI

I dunno, that he'll talk to you.

NATE

Yo, does he look you in the eyes when he shakes your hand?

RAVI

What?

NATE

I bet he does.

RAVI

Does what?

NATE

No, he just always does that whole Black-dude-no-look-hand-shake-thing with me.

RAVI

What are you talkin about?

NATE

That thing, man. You know, some Black guys when they shake hands with a white dude they make a point not to look em in the eye. It's like a little 'fuck you'. You don't know what I'm talkin about?

RAVI

No.

NATE

Trust me, it's a thing. I've done some extensive research and it's a thing.

RAVI

Fascinating stuff.

Nate grabs his towel.

NATE

Aright man, I'm outa here.

RAVI

You know where you're going?

NATE

Think I can figure it out.

Nate starts to head out.

RAVI cont.

Yo.

NATE

What?

RAVI

I got a concept for you.

NATE

For what?

RAVI

A documentary.

NATE

Yeah.

RAVI

It's fuckin hot.

NATE

What is it?

RAVI

Go swim. I'll tell you about it later.

NATE

What's the concept?

The front door opens and Silas comes in.  
He carries a few papers and packets from the  
University of Rio.

NATE  
(to himself)

Speak a the devil.

RAVI  
(to Silas)

How'd your meeting go?

SILAS

I made some really good contacts.

Nice. RAVI

Hey Silas. NATE

Nate. SILAS

Nate extends his hand and he and Silas  
Shake hands. **Silas never makes eye  
contact with Nate.** Silas speaks to Ravi,  
never looking at Nate.

SILAS  
(to Ravi)  
I could get on the internet for a second?

Yeah, go'head. RAVI

Silas pulls a laptop off the table and sits with  
it on the couch.

NATE  
(to Ravi)  
So I'll catch up with you later then?

Maybe I'll come find you. RAVI

Cool. NATE

Nate gives Ravi dap and heads out.

You gotta printer? SILAS

In my room. RAVI

You heard of macarena? SILAS

	RAVI
The dance?	
	SILAS
The stadium.	
	RAVI
<i>Maracanã?</i>	
	SILAS
	(that's the one)
Yeah.	
	RAVI
It's the biggest stadium in the country.	
	SILAS
Dr. Ligeiro invited me to a game there.	
	RAVI
That's cool he invited you out.	
	SILAS
Yeah.	
	RAVI
When's the game?	
	SILAS
Tonight.	
	RAVI
You know how you're getting there?	
	SILAS
Dr. Ligeiro's taking me.	
	RAVI
He's from here?	
	SILAS
<i>Carioca, born an raised, son.</i>	
	RAVI
Stupid. Who's playing?	

SILAS

I dunno.

RAVI

You better find out. Don't wear the wrong jersey. Whatever you see everyone else wearing, buy that same shit.

SILAS

Did you know Brazilian soccer players name their moves?

RAVI

I did not know that.

SILAS

Yeah, they name their shots, their dribbles, passes, Dr. Ligeiro's writing a book about it. It's just like Black American basketball. His book traces those traditions back to West Africa.

RAVI

The tradition of showboating?

SILAS

No, *style*, Rav. The origins of coolness. Like it's just as important how smooth I look when I make the shot as whether the shot goes in. That's a very West African concept.

RAVI

See I always looked pretty smooth but my shots would never land.

SILAS

You know anyone in Bahia?

RAVI

Not well. Why?

SILAS

I'll probably want to do my field research in Salvador.

RAVI

Their beaches are filthy.



SILAS

Last summer they hosted the African Diaspora Political Conference in Salvador and some local performance groups put on a show for the ambassadors. After the show one of the delegates from Nigeria asked the performers “Where did you learn that song? It’s a dialect of Yoruba from my country that no one’s spoken for *hundreds of years*.” He couldn’t believe it. And the Brazilians, they just knew it as a song from the community; a children’s song. That shit blows my mind.

Silas gazes out the window of the apartment.

SILAS cont.

I hit a student, Rav.

RAVI

Today?

SILAS

No.

(beat)

I don’t know if I’m cut out to teach.

RAVI

How many students have you hit?

SILAS

Just this one.

RAVI

I think you’re doin alright.

SILAS

I was sitting at my desk grading papers, and this kid, Gabe Torres, creeps up on me and sprays me in the eye with Binaca breath freshener-

RAVI

Ouch-

SILAS

I jump up swinging my arms and kinda back handed him in the face. Knocked him through some tables, busted his lip-

RAVI

Oh well that’s-

SILAS

My eyes were burning-

RAVI

Well that's not like you hit him. That's a-

SILAS

A reflex.

RAVI

Yeah. A reflex.

SILAS

I hate this student; he has made my life *so* unpleasant. Yes, I couldn't see, and was in a fair amount of pain, but in my heart of hearts, in my peripheral of peripheral visions, did I know it was Gabriel Torres? Quite possibly.

RAVI

Who still uses breath spray?

SILAS

Gabriel Torres evidently, *and he needs it too*. So following the "incident" I'm whisked off to the rubber room to meet with my union rep and await a review committee. And I know they'll let me come back to work. They can't not let me. It'll all be another strange anecdote in a file somewhere down on Court Street, but I dunno if I wanna come back.

RAVI

Cuz a this kid?

SILAS

No, cuz a all these kids! I refuse to tap dance and do back flips to get *you* to study for *your* New York State Regents' Exam. Does that make me a bad person?

RAVI

I don't think so.

SILAS

I don't think so either. I can't relate to these kids, Rav- yo text messaging has been more detrimental to public education than crack-cocaine. I know this place has its share of problems. But just taking the bus today, walking around, feels like there's an ease between people here. You know what I mean? It's just not as tense or something. Like the students I saw today looked like they wanted to learn.

RAVI

You were at a university.

SILAS

True. But I mean, do your students want to learn?

RAVI

Most of them.

SILAS

That's like my ultimate fantasy.

RAVI

So let's make it a reality.

SILAS

I studied hard to be a teacher- this wasn't on some *I don't know what to do with my life so I guess I'll teach*, it's my passion, straight up, I dig it, I love learning and being around it. I just wanna be a teacher, Rav.

RAVI

So be a teacher!

SILAS

I *am* a teacher dammit!

RAVI

You are a teacher!

SILAS

So tell these kids!

RAVI

I will. How many ways can I put it? I'll write you a letter of affiliation myself. Do a English teaching Fulbright at the center.

SILAS

They are less competitive.

RAVI

And you can work with me.

SILAS

Alright. Let's do it.

Excited, Ravi gives Silas dap.

RAVI

Thas whassup.

SILAS  
When can I start?

RAVI  
What a good question.

SILAS  
When do classes start?

RAVI  
As of right now there are no classes.

SILAS  
Cuz it's summer break?

RAVI  
Yes. And...cuz all my teachers quit.

SILAS  
Because?

RAVI  
Because I was not able to pay them. Look....I have a little confession to make.

SILAS  
Okay.

RAVI  
I should have just told you when you got here.

SILAS  
Told me what?

RAVI  
I applied for emergency funding from the Ford Foundation.

SILAS  
(why are you telling me this?)

Okay.

RAVI  
The center's in a really tough place. Feel free to say no...

SILAS  
Say no to what?

RAVI  
If you could get word about my application to your mother...

SILAS  
My mother?

RAVI  
Yeah.

SILAS  
And say what?

RAVI  
Anything at all...

SILAS  
My mother doesn't do international funding.

RAVI  
Yeah, but...I mean she's there...

SILAS  
She is.

RAVI  
Whatever she could do would be amazing.

Silas nods.

RAVI cont.  
It's a little time sensitive. I think the next granting round starts in January.

SILAS  
I've kind of made a point of not doing that.

RAVI  
I completely understand. And normally I would never ask, you know that. I think I have a really good shot as it is, but we both know that's not always how shit works.

SILAS  
It's complicated, Rav. I wish it wasn't.

RAVI  
I hear you. But the work we do is *so* necessary. It's so needed right now.

SILAS

I believe you.

RAVI

When you start teaching up there you'll see. There's all this opportunity out here but this huge number of people just have no access to education.

SILAS

It's not that I don't-

RAVI

There's no safety net. When you fall you fall.

SILAS

I know-

RAVI

I'm not talkin statistics, I'm talking about families that I know personally. Do you believe in god?

SILAS

What?

RAVI

In Portuguese the verb for believe is *acreditar*. So the question isn't 'what do you believe in', but 'what do you give credit to?' See that's a very different question. When classes stopped a lot of the women studying at the center became prostitutes. These are good people Silas.

SILAS

(beat)

Forward me your application.

RAVI

Yeah?

SILAS

Let me read it.

RAVI

I'll do that right now.

SILAS

I'm not making any promises.

Of course.

RAVI

I'll look at it over and...

SILAS

Yo. Thank you. For real.

RAVI

Don't thank me yet.

SILAS

Ravi gets on the computer.

I'm sending it right now.

RAVI

Cool.

SILAS

Ravi hands the computer to Silas.

Just sent it.

RAVI

Okay.

SILAS

There is an awkward silence.

What you got goin on for the rest of the day?

RAVI

Not sure. Guess I have some reading to do.

SILAS

And you got plans tonight with the professor?

RAVI

Yeah.

SILAS

Cool. I think I might take Nate to Lapa, depending on when you get done if you wanna meet up.

RAVI

SILAS

I'll probably just come back here.

RAVI

If the front door to the lobby's locked when you get back just knock, Marcelo should be sleeping on the couch.

SILAS

I was also thinking I might just do my own thing for New Years too.

Ravi wags his finger disapprovingly.

RAVI

That's not gonna happen.

Silas shrugs. Ravi steps out onto the balcony. Silas gets back on the computer. Ravi takes out his cell phone and makes a call. He speaks in Portuguese to an answering machine.

RAVI cont.

Sou eu. Me liga. (It's me. Call me back.)

Ravi ends the call. A pained and serious expression has returned to his face.

End of Act One.



Act 2 Scene 1

Later the same day, it is nighttime. A shower runs in the bathroom. Nate can be heard singing a little to himself. He makes up words to the song *Garota de Ipanema*.

RAVI

Hello? Nate?

NATE O.S.

Yo!

RAVI

Anybody else home?

The water shuts off. Nate eventually emerges from the bathroom with a towel around his waste. He is now bright red.

NATE

I fell in love, Rav-

RAVI

Oh shit, son! Are you okay?

NATE

It's not that bad.

RAVI

That looks awful-

NATE

I think it got redder from the hot water.

RAVI

God man, you want some aloe or something?

NATE

Sure-

RAVI

It doesn't hurt?

NATE

Nah. I fell in love, Rav.

Ravi retrieves lotion from the bathroom.

RAVI

Yeah?

NATE

Like twenty-six times.

RAVI

It ain't hard to do out here.

NATE

And I'm not talking bout some fleeting lust neither, I seriously saw at least 11, nah like 19 women today that I would want as my life partner and love till forever no questions asked.

Ravi gives the lotion to Nate who begins applying it to his burns.

NATE

An these girls are mad aggressive, lookin me up and down like a piece a meat. I've never felt so...*attractive*.

RAVI

You're a good-looking guy.

NATE

Shut up. And yo, the public displays of affection are off the Richter. Are you kidding me? Brazilians are some kissy ass people.

RAVI

They're really warm.

NATE

Yeah they appear to be in heat most of the time.

RAVI

You know in Portuguese the word for alone is the same as lonely. They don't differentiate.

NATE

Just divin into that water it's like bein in a dream or somethin.

RAVI

One day at the beach and you're sold?

NATE

Hells yeah. They make change for you on the bus! What!?! I love this city. Yo, how young is young out here?

RAVI

What are we talking about now?

NATE

Like with women. What's young?

RAVI

What did you do at the beach?

NATE

I made a friend.

RAVI

A young friend I take it.

NATE

See I dunno.

RAVI

But you kinda do or you wouldn't be asking me that question.

NATE

She kissed me, Rav.

RAVI

Who kissed you?

NATE

You ever feel like a different person when you speak a different language? I say shit I would never say in English. Like,

(totally sincere)

*I like you. You're funny. You're pretty.*

RAVI

You don't say that in English?

NATE

No.

RAVI

You do know girls like to hear that stuff?

NATE

No I know, it just feels sleazy when I say it in English, but in Spanish, Portuguese, it's so natural. I couldn't imagine being monogamous in this town.

RAVI

It can be a challenge.

NATE

You have a girlfriend out here?

RAVI

I did for a while.

NATE

Yeah?

RAVI

(beat)

She had been a student up at the center. We're near a red light district. Some of the women take our classes. One of them and I became friends, we started dating-

NATE

You dated a...

RAVI

Bruna. Her name was Bruna. She had been a sex worker, but she wasn't working while we were together.

NATE

Okay...

RAVI

It's funny, westerners have this tendency to over think everything, like love is something you think about for a long time and then decide you're "in love". Brazilians fall in love like

(snap)

that, then decide what their gonna do about it. It got pretty real with me and Bruna, but I never...I was mad insecure about her past.

NATE

I don't blame you

RAVI

I never let her in. So, we broke up. She stopped coming to the center, went back to hustling.

NATE  
Damn.

RAVI  
(beat)  
You still tryna go out tonight?

NATE  
I dunno. You?

RAVI  
I could go either way. I figure we'll be up all night tomorrow.

NATE  
Yeah what's the plan for New Years?

RAVI  
We'll go down to the beach for the countdown. Then there's a after party at my yoga studio. But these girls might be a little old for you. Most of em are in their 20s.

NATE  
Fuck you.

Silas enters the apartment. He wears a red and black Flamengo Jersey and du-rag. Silas is serious and subdued. He never looks at Nate.

RAVI  
Hey, who won?

SILAS  
We did.

RAVI  
Some wild shit, right?

SILAS  
Yeah.

RAVI  
It's like the national religion out here.

SILAS  
I believe it.

RAVI  
You tryna go out?

SILAS  
Think I'm in for the night.

NATE  
That's a nice jersey, what team is that?

Silas completely ignores Nate and only addresses Ravi.

SILAS  
My mom looked over the application.

RAVI  
Yeah?

SILAS  
She said she'd be happy to put in a good word.

RAVI  
Fuck, thank you.

SILAS  
After the holidays she'll have them fast track the request.

RAVI  
What's that mean?

SILAS  
Could get the grant within a week.

RAVI  
Yo. You are a fuckin superhero, bro.

SILAS  
Is that what I am?

RAVI  
That's what you are.

SILAS  
Just get me back in the classroom.

RAVI

Workin on it.

SILAS

I think I figured out my Fulbright topic.

RAVI

What is it?

Silas looks at Nate for the first time.

SILAS

(menacing)

*Blood.*

RAVI

Okay.

SILAS

(to Ravi)

I'll tell you about in the morning.

RAVI

Cool.

SILAS

Goodnight.

RAVI

Sleep well, brother.

Silas heads into his bedroom and closes the door.

NATE

What the fuck is up with this guy?

RAVI

You wanna keep your voice down?

NATE

You know this all about though, right? Janelle. It's all about Janelle.

RAVI

He didn't say anything to me about that.

NATE

Of course he didn't. It's so fuckin obvious, dude. You remember our last year of college, he and Janelle studied abroad in Ghana, had that little fling? She got back, deaded shit with him and got with me, but he caught feelings, so he starts running his mouth about me as this "predator" in the community, tries to have me kicked out of X-House and on and on and on. But this is like ancient shit to me-

RAVI

It really is-

NATE

I know. But your boy's a diligent shit talker. Years later he's still runnin off at the mouth. I seen him at Keba's goin away party last month, said what's up to him, thought nothin of it, so why do I have to hear from Asha that dude was talkin all kinds a shit about me. An Asha wasn't even there! What does that tell you?

RAVI

I don't know-

NATE

My man had to be talkin some serious ca-ca for me to be hearing about it from a third party. And so what, ri? I know, I should be the bigger man. I should be flattered I'm so important to him. But Sam Dillard was at this party, and a whole bunch of other film kids like Sam, with family connections, so when the producer that's supposed to be bank rolling my project stops returning my calls two weeks later I had to wonder. I know for a fact Sam used to work with that production company. This dude's little hurt feelings mighta cost me two years of work. And you know me, Rav, I'm not one to start shit, I'm a peace lovin brother. But that's my livelihood he's fuckin with. And if dude took the time to speak to me, to my face, instead of speakin bout me, behind my back, he might find out that Janelle is a fuckin pariah, on some real pathological evil shit, who I've been broken up with for three months now!, and that my painfully drawn out involvement with her probably did him a huge favor in the long. He should be *thankin* me.

RAVI

Maybe you should tell him that.

NATE

What, that I just got my heart ripped out of my chest by the girl he's been obsessing over his entire adult life? Yeah, I dunno what good that'll do.

RAVI

Might make my life easier.

NATE

What? Has he been talking about me?



RAVI

No! Will you relax?

NATE

I'm relaxed. I had a great fuckin day.

RAVI

Sounds like you did.

NATE

I'm self-aware enough to know why I irk people, why I really rub some people the wrong way. And I do not blame Silas for a lot the issues he has with me. I blame *me* for a lot of em. And I blame slam poetry for a lot of it too.

RAVI

(where is this going)

Slam poetry.

NATE

Yeah. Junior year, when he got all into that shit, it really fucked with his head.

RAVI

(not at all convinced)

Mmmhmmm.

NATE

I feel bad for the guy, I really do. He's confused, and I think the poetry thing only exacerbated his confusion. It can be a really damaging experience, especially for rich kids of color. For one, on an artistic level, it sucks. But the dangerous part is it creates these oppression contests where the more you have suffered through in your life the more valid you are as a person and there's something really unhealthy about all that-

RAVI

Interesting theory-

NATE

*AND* it causes delusional behavior. It's like my crazy aunts in Long Island that can't stop talkin bout the Holocaust, it's a form of insanity. Like people thinking that their sonnet to Mumia is a revolution. No. Revolution is revolution. *Your sonnet's a fuckin sonnet!*

RAVI

What are you so angry about?

NATE

I am angry about nepotism, mainly cuz I never seem to get any! This kid, who stands to inherit the fuckin world, while I will inherit the debt from my father's maxed out credit cards, wants to call *me* out on fakin-jacks, my man went to fuckin Choate High School yo!

Silas emerges from his room. He stands in the hallway and glares at Nate for a beat.

Eventually Silas turns and steps into the bathroom. He can be heard urinating.

The toilet flushes, Silas washes his hands, steps out of the bathroom, and goes back to his room. Ravi sighs.

RAVI

You want a beer?

NATE

Sure.

Ravi retrieves two beers from the kitchen. They drink.

RAVI

You need to forgive her.

NATE

Forgive who?

RAVI

Even if she did you dirty, you need to forgive her.

NATE

Why?

RAVI

Cuz it's toxic, you can't hold onto that.

NATE

I know.

RAVI

You gotta get it outa your system.

I'm tryin.

NATE

Colonix-

RAVI

Chill-

NATE

Whatever you need to do to cleanse.

RAVI

NATE

The last conversation I had with Janelle, I was like 'here I am. This is me...this's as vulnerable as I get', and she was like, 'oh, that's your neck? Lemme stomp on it a little more for you.'

RAVI

Listen, I know it's the trendiest shit ever, but Nate, yoga's really powerful. For real, I think everyone should do yoga. Look at my posture. Look at yours. First class is free.

Nate tosses his beer out.

NATE

What's this concept you got for me?

RAVI

Yo sit down.

NATE

You gonna pitch to me?

RAVI

I don't know how to pitch, but I'll tell you about it.

NATE

Is there funding?

RAVI

Very likely.

NATE

I'm all ears.

RAVI

If nothing else, I'd love for you to come shoot some video content for the center's website.

NATE

I could do that.

RAVI

But...

NATE

But?

RAVI

There is a story you might be interested in.

NATE

I like stories.

RAVI

Alright.

Ravi gears up to tell the story.

RAVI cont.

So there's this kid, right?

NATE

I like it already.

RAVI

First generation, child a immigrants. He grows up out in Dirty Jerse, livin in the motel where his parents work, scrubbin sinks, fishin condoms outa toilets. And this scrappy lil immigrant kid is like a freak of nature, he's just mad good at school. So he gets himself a scholarship to college.

NATE

Sounds familiar.

RAVI

And right outa college he's scooped up by a hedge fund, working sixty-hour weeks, betting against currencies in devastated countries, much like the one his parents came from. On the outside, he's living the life, girls, drugs, whole nine. But on the inside he's like rotting away; this little American dream immigrant kid is losing his fuckin mind. This is like the back story, okay?

NATE

Okay.

RAVI

So one day, on a whim, he goes to this fundraiser, and sees this sad slide show of these beautiful children at a community center that's on the verge of collapse, and these images are like haunting. And something inside him wakes up. And he doesn't go to work the next day. Cuz he's on a plane to a country where he don't speak the language, but is now the executive director of this center that he suddenly feels compelled to save.

NATE

You never gave notice at work?

RAVI

Nah.

NATE

*Gangsta.*

RAVI

He's keeping the place running outa pocket, and sets up this program for internationals to come volunteer teach. Everything's going smooth until one day, the sub-commander of the favela pays him a visit. He tells our guy, listen, you can't have all these tourists up here. So they work out a deal. He has the tourist bring in gifts for the drug lords. Stuff that's hard to get out here: Basketball shoes, video games, iPhones. Only he don't want one iPhone for his girlfriend, he wants a hundred iPhones, to sell. So that's what we do. And it goes surprisingly well. We're in the black for the first time. Then police decide to start a war. Now all bets are off, we don't know who's who. You got all these displaced people coming up from the south, all these rookie cops shootin up the place. It's a fuckin mess, Nate.

NATE

Sounds like it.

RAVI

The internationals are afraid to come volunteer. So what does our hero do next? He enlists the help of his best friends and has them bring out some packages.

Ravi gives Nate a quick gun finger point, wink and mouth click – to say 'this is where you come in.'

RAVI cont.

But, as luck would have it, half of em get snagged by some grubby customs officers. So now your boy's gotta go see the king of the hill tomorrow, an tell him I lost his Christmas presents.

Whose stuff was I carrying? NATE

*O gerente garias-* (the general) RAVI

He's a druglord? SILAS

He's *the* druglord. RAVI

Are you for real? NATE

True story. And the best part is- RAVI

Rav- NATE

The best part of it is that's where the shit starts! I know it's a little unconventional, but, c'mon yo, the concept is hot- RAVI

You tryna make a suicide film? NATE

No. It's a film about hope. Film like that could revitalize the center- RAVI

Film like that could get you killed? NATE

Nah- RAVI

My man, you need to get the fuck outa Rio. NATE

I made commitments here. RAVI

To be a martyr? NATE

RAVI

To provide a service.

NATE

Are you that outa touch with reality?

RAVI

No Nate. Actually I'm very in touch with reality for the first time in my life.

NATE

Fuck that shit yo. I'm not cool with this shit at all. You wanna get killed over this, I want no part of it.

RAVI

You make a movie, someone could get inspired, start a foundation, who knows? Could make me safer.

NATE

*Could?* Ravi. I don't know who you think I am. That's not a risk I would ever take.

RAVI

I'm getting grant money for this.

NATE

I don't care!

RAVI

I have access-

NATE

No fuckin way dude! I'm taken your ass home.

RAVI

I'm touched that you feel so-

NATE

Dead up! I ain't leavin without you. Have you lost your mind?

RAVI

I didn't mean to upset you.

NATE

Rav-

RAVI

Sorry I told you.

NATE

You honestly thought I'd wanna film that shit?!

RAVI

Things are about to turn around.

NATE

How could you know that?

RAVI

*Cuz they have to!*

Ravi throws out his drink and heads outside.  
After a moment Nate follows him out. They  
both gaze out into the night.

Silence.

RAVI cont.

Two weeks ago I went to see Bruna where she works at. She didn't wanna talk, so I stayed and had a drink. They got these outdoor bars. I'm out there, sitting in a plastic chair, checkin out the girls in bikini's, when these cops stroll up. Police never used to be out there. I don't know if they're off duty or what, but they order up some drinks and post up on a corner. Their leader is this older grizzled dude, keeps walking up to girls, talkin real close to their face while his squad would kinda surround em. I watch each girl talk to him, tryin not to look too shook as they get the fuck away. So dude walks up to Bruna and starts rappin to her. But Bruna's a tough chick. She holds her ground, talks straight to him, told his boys to fall back and they do. Then she heads upstairs with the one. I swear she glanced over at me for a split second as she walked inside with him.

(beat)

Not two minutes later, all his boys rush on upstairs into the room. It's pretty fuckin clear at this point what's goin on up there. And I saw the whole shit play out. So what do I do? I sit there and finish my beer.

(beat)

Bout ten minutes go by and they all rush back out. One of em's playin a little video he just recorded on his cell phone and laughing.

(beat)

I try to go up and see if she was okay, but the girls won't let me inside. I see one a her homegirls is crying. She's holding a towel soaked in blood.

Ravi looks at Nate.



RAVI cont.

*The center stays open.*

Ravi heads to bed. At a loss for words, Nate watches him go. Nate looks out into the night and finishes his beer.

Act 2 Scene 2

The following morning. Silas sits out on the balcony with Ravi's laptop. Nate sleeps on the couch. Nate stirs a little, eventually sitting up.

NATE

Owww...

Nate's sunburn looks much worse. He tries to apply lotion to his back and shoulders, hurting himself.

NATE cont.

Oww!

Nate looks outside at Silas helplessly and scowls. Nate heads to the bathroom and looks at his burn in the mirror and groans some more. He closes the door and uses the bathroom.

Nate comes back out and puts on some clothes very carefully and painfully. He cleans up some of his belongings from the floor.

NATE cont.

Ravi? Yo Rav!

Nate goes into Ravi's room, then comes back. He heads out onto the balcony where Silas sits still working on the laptop.

NATE cont.

(to Silas)

You seen Rav?

Silas does not respond.

NATE cont.

(under his breath)

Motherfucker.

NATE cont.  
(beat)  
Silas.  
Nate shakes his head and goes back inside,  
then comes right back out.  
NATE cont  
Silas?!  
Silas looks back at Nate, notices him for the  
first time and removes headphones from  
inside his ears. He looks at Nate waiting for  
him to speak.  
NATE cont.  
Sorry, uh...you know where Ravi is?  
Silas shakes his head no and starts to put his  
earplugs back in.  
NATE cont.  
You see him this morning?  
SILAS  
Yeah.  
NATE  
You saw him leave?  
SILAS  
Yeah.  
NATE  
He tell you where he was going?  
SILAS  
No.  
NATE  
He tell you when he'd be back?  
Silas shrugs and puts the headphones back  
in his ears.

Silas? NATE cont.

SILAS  
(getting irritated)  
What?

NATE  
Do you know when he'll be back?

SILAS  
No.

NATE  
Did he tell you anything?

SILAS  
No.

Silas closes the computer and heads inside.  
Nate follows him in.

NATE  
What are you doing?

SILAS  
What are *you* doing?

NATE  
I-

SILAS  
You got something to say to me, Nate?

Nate is silent.

SILAS cont.  
Your breath smells like ass and you're following me around like you got something to tell me.

(quick beat)  
No? My mistake.

Silas starts to walk to his room.

NATE  
(more to himself)

Yo fuck you man.

Silas stops dead in his tracks and turns around.

SILAS  
Excuse me.

NATE  
Yo, I just-

SILAS  
What the fuck do you want?

NATE  
I'm-

SILAS  
You're lookin at me like you wanna fight me.

NATE  
I'm not tryna-

SILAS  
You got something to do?

NATE  
I'm not tryna fight you.

Silas shakes his head and starts to leave.  
Nate paces about. Silas exits the room and heads for the door.

NATE cont.  
Where are you going?

Silas stops again in disbelief.

SILAS  
I'm going to the beach. That alright with you?

NATE

Ravi's in trouble.

(beat)

He told you what he was taking care of this morning?

Silas does not respond.

NATE cont.

I think he's in trouble.

SILAS

With what?

NATE

The center.

SILAS

What about it?

NATE

There's uh, I think there's a problem up there.

SILAS

What led you to think that?

NATE

Ravi did.

SILAS

Keep talking.

NATE

He uhh, he's, he might owe money to some people-

SILAS

He owes someone money?

NATE

I brought packages for him that were confiscated at the airport.

SILAS

Why'd they take them?

NATE

I don't know.

SILAS

What was in them?

NATE

I don't know.

SILAS

Seems like there's a lot you don't know.

NATE

Silas, can you put your fuckin ego aside for a second and listen? Ravi's life is in danger. Do you get that?

SILAS

It's still pretty cryptic, Nate.

NATE

I don't know what else to tell you. I'm not sure if anyone even knows where he is.

SILAS

Do you?

NATE

No.

SILAS

You know where the center is?

NATE

The north?

SILAS

That's real helpful.

NATE

All I know for sure is that he's in trouble and it's very likely we are the only fuckin people who know that.

SILAS

You wanna call the U.S. Embassy?

NATE

Not especially, but I will if I have to.

SILAS

He has a cell phone.

NATE

You got the number?

SILAS

I do.

NATE

Can we call him?

Silas retrieves the computer.

NATE cont.

I would say call the police but, out here...

Silas looks on his own cell phone for the number. He uses Skype on the laptop to place the call.

NATE cont.

Yo sorry about...my breath earlier-

Nate tries to smell his own breath. The phone rings. It goes to voicemail.

RAVI RECORDED

*Sou eu Ravi, por favor deixe um recado com seu nome e telefone e eu te ligo quando puder-* (This is Ravi, please leave me a message with your name and telephone number and I'll call you when I can.)

NATE

You want to leave a message?

Silas ends the call. Nate brushes his teeth. He returns and the two sit in silence.

SILAS

When did he tell you about these problems?

NATE

Last night.

Silence. Silas dials Ravi again.



RAVI RECORDED

*Sou eu Ravi, por favor deixe um recado com seu nome e telefone-*

Silas ends the call. Silence.

NATE

So you might uh, teach up there?

Silas shrugs.

NATE cont.

You want something to drink? Some water?

Silas shakes his head no. Nate gets himself a drink.

NATE cont.

I hear you're applying for a Fulbright.

Silas nods.

NATE cont.

Something about blood?

Silas dials Ravi again.

RAVI RECORDED

*Sou eu Ravi, por favor deixe um recad-*

Silas ends the call.

SILAS

You know what the difference between Brazil and the United States is?

Nate waits for the answer.

SILAS cont.

Blood laws.

Confused, Nate waits for more.

SILAS cont.

Up north we decided one drop of *my blood* makes you Black, down here they decided a drop of *your blood* makes you not Black. So when white men raped their slaves here, the children were no longer Black, and could be legitimized, maybe inherit some land. *They acknowledged their children.* Isn't that funny?

Nate is still confused. Silas dials Ravi again.

RAVI RECORDED

*Sou eu Ravi, por favor deixe-*

Silas ends the call.

NATE

Yo, I'll be straight with you, I don't know what you heard or didn't hear last night, but just to clear the air...I lost a job recently, and I'm not sure why, but I do know that Sam Dillard used to work with the production company that had hired me- and that he was at a party you and I both recently attended.

Silas nods knowingly.

NATE cont.

And this might sound childish or petty, but word got back to me that my name came up in conversation at that party, and the industry I work in is *all about* personal relationships... And we don't need to keep talking about this, but, I feel the need to say, it was surprising to me that I was there, you were there, and after I left, to my understanding, my name came up quite a few times, if that did in fact happen. If there was something you wanted to let me know, or discuss, I'm a little curious why you didn't just say it to me.

SILAS

I had nothing to let you know.

Silence. Nate can't let it go.

NATE

I have to ask, did my name come up?

Silas nods.

NATE cont.

You care to elaborate?

Silas shakes his head no.

NATE

But you'd see where I might be a little curious?

SILAS

I do.

Silas dials Ravi again.

RAVI RECORDED

*Sou eu Ravi, por favor deixe um recado-*

NATE

What's the fuckin deal man?

RAVI RECORDED

*com seu nome e telefone-*

SILAS

What's the deal?

RAVI RECORDED

*e eu te ligo quando puder.*

The answering machine beeps.

NATE

I never had no problems with you. Matter fact, we used to be friends. But after Ghana, yo, Janelle created that situation, not me. What did I ever do to you?

SILAS

What did you do to me?

NATE

You fuckin hated me bro. I felt it. And it wasn't passive, you went out of your way to hate me. Was it really all about Janelle?

SILAS

No Nate, it wasn't.

NATE

What was it then?

SILAS

It was about all the girls.

NATE

All what girls?

SILAS

And understand, this is not coming from a place of jealousy, but from a man watching another man's behavior. You slept with a lot of women, all women of color, and the way you went about it was pretty foul-

NATE

Meaning what exactly-

SILAS

And in a way, just by being your friend I had vouched for you, so whether I wanted to be or not I was implicated in your fuckery. And it struck an especially raw nerve the way you went after these real young sistas. It was like college was some sort of sexual safari for you.

NATE

Aright, dude-

SILAS

You asked-

NATE

I did.

SILAS

From the outside it looked like you were collecting accessories to your identity.

NATE

That's where I'm from, that's who I am-

SILAS

I see you've matured a lot since then.

NATE

I'm from Brooklyn-

SILAS

Good for you.

The computer beeps.

SKYPE VOICE

If you're satisfied with your message please press-

Silas shuts the computer.

SILAS cont.

Some people at Keba's party asked me about Janelle. That's how your name came up.

NATE

You been in touch with her?

SILAS

She's a friend.

NATE

I was living with her for 3 years, I didn't know y'all two were friends.

SILAS

I helped her through a tough time.

NATE

Am I that tough time?

SILAS

Not everything is about you, Nate. Janelle was in the hospital.

NATE

She was?

SILAS

Yeah.

NATE

When?

SILAS

Last month.

NATE

She okay?

SILAS

Some people had heard that Janelle was in the hospital and asked me about it. She went to have an abortion and I went with her. A few days later she was still bleeding so she went back. She hemorrhaged a lot of blood. I stayed there with her. People at the party asked who the father was, and I told them. They asked if the father was there with her and I told them that he wasn't.

NATE

Is she okay?

SILAS

I mean, was I mistaken? Did you show up?

NATE

I didn't know-

SILAS

Don't tell you me you didn't know, we both know that's a fuckin lie!

NATE

We had broken up!

SILAS

So fuckin what?

NATE

She broke up with me!

SILAS

I don't care-

NATE

Yo how is this any of your business?

SILAS

Janelle almost died aborting your progeny, Nate. And where the fuck were you?!

NATE

That's none a your business.

SILAS

It is my business, Nate.

NATE

Why, cuz she broke your heart? Cuz you wanna protect her now?

SILAS

What's it like to live without personal responsibility?

NATE

You tell me, bro. I never had a trust fund. What's that shit's like?

SILAS

Nate, you make a living flying around the world filming and fucking brown people. What would you call that?

NATE

When you say brown people, do you include yourself in that?

SILAS

Excuse me?

NATE

Are you outraged on their behalf, or as one of them?

SILAS

You better watch how the fuck you talk to me right now.

NATE

No, Silas, I don't need to watch it, cuz you don't got it like that, you can't have it both ways. You can't be a whiney ass rich kid one day and a hood nigga the next. It don't work that way so quit actin hard, it don't suit you.

SILAS

Did you just call me a nigger?

NATE

Go write a fuckin poem about it.

SILAS

You really want me to put my hands on you?

NATE

You're still talking, my dude.

Silas gets in Nate's face.

SILAS

I'm right here.

NATE

Whyn't you fall back.

SILAS

Or what, Nate?

NATE

Don't test me fam.

Nate clenches his fists. Silas leans in.

SILAS cont.

What you gon' do? Huh, Brooklyn? You say something? I can't hear you.

NATE

You wanna hit me, son?

*I'm not your son-*

SILAS

Silas hits Nate hard in the face. Nate stumbles back as Ravi enters the apartment wheeling a large suitcase.

Hello?

RAVI

Silence. Silas and Nate stare at Ravi.

What's goin on?

RAVI cont.

Oh you know, just catchin up.

SILAS

(beat)

You got my bag back?

NATE

I did.

RAVI

Packages too?

NATE

I believe so.

RAVI

Where you been?

SILAS

Straightening out a little mix up.

RAVI

A mix up?

SILAS

Yep.

RAVI

With packages?

SILAS



RAVI

Should be all good to start classes in a few weeks. You'll have to let me know if there's any textbooks you want me to order for you.

SILAS

What did I bring out here?

RAVI

What did you...

SILAS

The packages I brought you.

RAVI

Yeah.

SILAS

What was in 'em?

RAVI

Stuff for the center.

SILAS

Can I see?

NATE

Yeah Rav, let's see.

RAVI

The school supplies you brought?

SILAS

Yeah.

RAVI

I already took em up. I can show you when you come out.

SILAS

How bout these?

RAVI

What about em?

SILAS

Can I look inside there?

It's all packed up.

RAVI

So unpack it.

SILAS

Is there a reason we need to do this now?

RAVI

Now's as good a time as any.

NATE

I'd like to see it.

SILAS

As would I.

NATE

And I'd like to not make a mess with box packaging everywhere-

RAVI

I'll clean it up.

SILAS

I'll help him.

NATE

It's fuckin New Years Eve, will you guys chill out. I'll open em when I bring you guys up.

RAVI

Ravi starts to exit with the suitcase.

SILAS

I did you a favor, Rav.

RAVI

And I am forever indebted to you.

SILAS

So you're gonna do what I tell you.

RAVI

(beat)

Fine. You wanna open em up? Be my guest.

Silas places the suitcase on the table and unzips it. He removes a box and starts to pry it open.

RAVI cont.

*Please don't.*

Silas opens the box and removes packaging. He looks at the boxes content and shakes his head in disbelief.

RAVI

I am sorry I felt the need to-

SILAS

Don't talk to me right now.

NATE

What's in there?

RAVI

Does it make a difference who it's for?

SILAS

Not to me.

NATE

What is it?

Nate goes to look inside the box.

RAVI

If they pacify the area, we're done.

Nate removes night vision scopes for assault rifles.

NATE

The fuck is this?

RAVI

I can explain.

SILAS

Don't bother.

Silas heads to the room he's staying in.

RAVI cont.

Silas.

Silas does not respond. Ravi follows him into the room. Nate continues to remove accessories to weapons from the packages.

RAVI O.S.

Will you hear me out?

SILAS O.S.

(inaudible)

The grant's not coming.

RAVI O.S.

I didn't have a choice.

SILAS O.S.

(slower)

The emergency funding-

Silas returns carrying all of his belongings.  
Ravi follows him out.

SILAS cont.

you applied for, I'm making sure you don't get it.

RAVI

(to Silas)

Will you at least come meet the kids we work with?

SILAS

I'm sure they're lovely.

RAVI

Can we talk about this?

SILAS

There's nothing to talk about.

RAVI

Please stay for New Years.

Silas heads for the door. Ravi blocks his way.

RAVI cont.

Please.

SILAS

You lied to me.

RAVI

Yes and-

SILAS

No, not *and*. That's it.

RAVI

People are getting killed everyday.

SILAS

So I've heard.

NATE

What are you a fuckin arms dealer now?

RAVI

No I'm-

SILAS

That is what it looks like

RAVI

We got the largest open-air drug market on the planet, which keeps a few thousand people from having to eat trash. And they're the criminals? You want better for these kids? You wanna solve poverty? Poverty ain't the one to be solved. That's like blaming smoke for the fire. Poverty's not the fuckin problem! Concentrated wealth is the problem, that's creates all this shit!

(quick beat)

Yeah, I've taken sides. And I'm at peace with that decision.

(beat)

Come work with me.

(to Silas)

You wanna teach? People are beggin for classes.

(to Nate)

You want some shit to document? This is history.

RAVI cont.

(to both)

Or y'all can come back in a few years. I'm sure there'll be some great new hotels to stay at. Check out some Olympics. Go fuck my ex-girlfriend for twenty dollars.

(beat)

Silas!

SILAS

What?

RAVI

Tell me what to do here...

(beat)

You know I almost drowned my first day in Rio? There was a child calling for help by where I was swimming so I wade over to him and in an instant the bottom drops out, the current's tuggin at me hard. I can't get *myself* back to the shore. All the lifeguards are saving this kid so no one sees me. *I felt so stupid that I refused to call for help.* I'm swimming as hard as I can, gettin nowhere. Did you know you're supposed to swim at an angle? I did not know this. I remember thinking to myself, 'damn son, this is how you're gonna die, how retarded is this?' Finally I started feeling some sand under my feet. I drop to my knees and vomit up all the water I had swallowed.

(breaking)

This is me calling for help. *Silas. Nate. I need help.*

Ravi composes himself quickly.

RAVI cont.

I miss this. I love you guys. We had so much fun in college. Don't you miss college?

(no response)

Well I do. So who's ready to hit the beach?

Silas and Nate don't move; they stare at one another.

Ravi takes a deep breath and begins a Sun Salutation.

Fireworks pop in the distance.

Lights slowly fade to black.

END OF PLAY.

You Can't Win

Book and Lyrics by Ben Snyder  
Music and Lyrics by Jenn Hartmann

**Based on the novel by Jack Black**

**©2011**

## CHARACTERS

OLD JACK  
YOUNG JACK  
FATHER  
BARTENDER  
BEV  
HECKLER  
SY  
GEORGE  
TEX  
OLD MAN  
OLD WOMAN  
MILK WOMAN  
MILK MAN  
MAID  
JIMMY SHINN  
OFFICER 1  
OFFICER 2  
CAPTAIN  
MISS SINGLETON  
OLDER GIRLS  
JULIA  
BUM 1  
BUM 2  
JUDGE  
PRISONERS  
SMILER  
SALT CHUNK MARY  
JACK'S LAWYER  
BALIFF  
SHORTY  
PAULIE  
SLICK  
TOUGH PRISONER  
FOOT AND A HALF GEORGE  
THE SANCTIMONIOUS KID  
SOLDIER JOHNNIE  
TAILER  
HOLIDAY SHOPPER  
CLERK  
POLICE OFFICERS  
SUSPICIOUS CLERK  
SWEDISH WOMAN  
DRUNKS



CHARACTERS cont.

BARTENDER  
CUSTOMERS  
WORKING GIRLS  
GOLD TOOTH  
JAZZ WOMAN  
INTELLIGENT CHAP  
DIRTY DICK  
GUARDS  
FREMONT OLDER  
FREMONT OLDER  
JUDGE  
PROSECUTOR  
SECURITY GUARD  
YOUNG TOUGH  
DETECTIVE  
ASSOCIATE  
YOUNG POLICE OFFICER  
COURT SPECTATORS  
NEWSPAPER REPORTER  
YOUNG WOMAN  
YOUNG TOUGH  
POLICEMAN

## PROLOGUE

At rise: Lights up on Old Jack alone on stage.

### OLD JACK

Pardon me, excuse me...scuse me. Uhh, good evening. Thanks for coming out. Before we uh, commence with this evening's occasion I'd just like to say a few words if that's all right.

(genuinely asking)

Is it? May I? Okay. This is my story. The things you're about to see actually happened. I've taken license here and there so as not to malign the dead or incriminate the living. That said, I feel the need to dedicate this performance to Fremont Older, to Foot an a half George, to the unnamed friend who sawed me out of the San Francisco jail and to that dirty, disreputable, crippled beggar, "Sticks" Sullivan who picked the buckshot out of my back – under the bridge – at Baraboo, Wisconsin.

(quick beat)

Any audience member with a spoonful of imagination might picture me as a boy, going home, then to schools in turn, then to some sort of an office job; advancement here and there, always leading a well-ordered, quiet, studious life, until I finally arrive at a respectable and responsible position somewhere. That's the way it should have been, but it wasn't.

Lights spread to reveal a funeral service underway. Mourners pay their respects.

Young Jack, a small boy, sits by his father in the front pew; he looks up at his stoic dad who eventually begins to weep. Young Jack clenches his little fists, tightens his jaw and squeezes out a few tears.

### OLD JACK cont.

IT MAY NOT MEAN MUCH TO THE AVERAGE CHAP  
TO SAY 'I'D LIKE YOU TO MEET MY MOTHER'  
BUT TO ME IT MEANS MORE THAN WORDS CAN SAY  
IF MY LIFE COULD HAVE BEEN ANOTHER  
IT SEEMS TO EXPLAIN WHY A MAN WITH HIS MOM  
IS SO MANY THINGS I AM NOT  
SO MANY THINGS THAT I WILL NEVER BE  
THE LIFE I NEVER GOT  
NOW I'M NOT LUGGIN IN THE FACT  
THAT I WAS LEFT MOTHERLESS AT TEN  
BUT DON'T A FELLOW HAVE THE RIGHT TO WONDER  
WHAT ELSE MIGHT HAVE BEEN

Old Jack watches as Young Jack and his  
Father exit the church.

OLD JACK cont.

Before my twentieth birthday, I will be in the dock of a criminal court, on trial for burglary. I will be acquitted. I will desert my father and home, go on the road and become a snapper-up of small things, a tapper of tills, a street-door sneak thief, a prowler of cheap lodging houses, and finally a promising burglar in a small way...

Act 1 Scene 2

OLD JACK

A few days after the funeral, father sold our little cottage home and furnishings and moved us into a hotel in the city.

Lights reveal the front of an old hotel.  
Dusk. Young Jack sits on the front steps.  
All around the town is alive with activity.

Bev Shannon, the town drunk is ejected  
from the hotel bar.

BARTENDER

I've had enough a you for one night!

BEV

Better be keerful.

BARTENDER

Give it a rest, Bev.

BEV

I hain't stopped killin' jest 'cause Abe Lincoln says the war's over.

HECKLER

Look Out, Bev. You're limpin' on the wrong leg.

OLD JACK

Our town was full of bad men. All had been in the war on one side or the other.  
Everybody had a pistol or two, and everybody knew how to use them.

BEV

Watch it, kid!

YOUNG JACK

Sorry, mister.

A train whistles loudly. The whole town  
looks off in the distance.

OLD JACK

One evening when the train came in, a single traveler got off.

The Gray Suit Man walks into town carrying  
a large trunk.

OLD JACK cont.

I wondered what kind of man he could be that possessed such a wonderful suit.

The Gray Suit Man his trunk in front of the  
hotel and heads inside. Young Jack inspects  
the trunk.

OLD JACK cont.

He had with him a leather trunk. The thing fascinated me. It suggested travel, adventure  
by land and sea – the world. It roused strange thoughts and longings in my mind that I  
did not yet understand.

YOUNG JACK

*I must have a gray suit.*

OLD JACK

(looking to Young Jack)

A big problem for a boy with no income.

Cy talks to a George outside of his shop.  
Young Jack approaches.

YOUNG JACK

Excuse me, Sir.

CY

What can I do for you?

YOUNG JACK

Lookin for work.

CY

You hear that George? Need any help over at the casino?

GEORGE

Layaway from it, kid; it's a tough racket. Look at me and my gatherings of forty years. I  
ain't got a white quarter to my name; if it was rainin' soup I couldn't buy myself a tin  
spoon, and I've got a string of debts longer than a widow's clothesline.

TEX

Hey, Sy. Forgot to tell you, I'm rafflin' off a hoss an' buggy and you'd better take a half  
dozen tickets. You stand to win a good rig.

SY  
(sarcastic)

I'm sure I do.

YOUNG JACK  
Excuse me, sir, you wouldn't happen to be hiring would you?

TEX  
Hiring? Who?

YOUNG JACK  
Why me.

TEX  
You?! That's a good one.

Young Jack approaches various people  
about work and is rejected by all.

YOUNG JACK  
CAN I CLEAN YOUR STOOP?  
CAN I BUILD YOUR COOP?  
CAN I WASH YOUR BAR?  
STIR YOUR TAR?  
NEED A PUSH OR A PULL?

OLD MAN  
I NEED A MULE!

YOUNG JACK  
NEED SOME HELP? NEED A HAND?

OLD LADY  
HONEY, I NEED A MAN!

YOUNG JACK  
IT'S TIME TO BE SOMEBODY

Defeated, Young Jack sits down on a bench  
by Bev, who looks up a Young Jack  
disgusted.

BEV  
You ain't a very strong boy is ya?

What? Course I am!

YOUNG JACK

Well, don't let' em rub it into you.

BEV

But I-

YOUNG JACK

If you're so crazy about a job, go get one!

BEV

Bev kicks Young Jack off the bench. Young Jack dusts himself off and takes a more aggressive approach.

I CAN BE A MINER  
WORK IN YOUR DINER  
HARVEST YOU'RE FARM  
HEARD YOU'RE RAISIN' UP A BARN?

YOUNG JACK

IT'S TIME TO BE SOMEBODY

I CAN COOK  
I CAN CLEAN  
I CAN OIL AND STEAM  
I CAN SHOOT  
I CAN GUARD  
I CAN BOIL AND CHARD  
I CAN PREACH  
I CAN POST

YOU CAN BRAG YOU CAN BOAST

BEV

I CAN POLISH AND MEND  
I CAN TWIST  
I CAN BEND

YOUNG JACK

OH IT'S TIME...  
IT'S TIME TO BE SOMEBODY

YOUNG JACK cont.

I CAN FIGHT  
I CAN DANCE  
JUST GIVE ME A STINKIN' CHANCE  
I CAN MOP  
I CAN SWEEP

BEV

CAN I GET SOME GOD DAMN SLEEP?

YOUNG JACK

I CAN MILL  
I CAN TILL  
I CAN HUNT  
I CAN KILL  
I CAN FISH  
I CAN MINE  
I CAN LOSE  
I CAN FIND  
I CAN SEW  
I CAN HOE  
I CAN PLANT  
I CAN GROW  
IT'S TIME...

I CAN MILL  
I CAN TILL  
I CAN HUNT  
I CAN KILL  
I CAN FISH  
I CAN MINE  
I CAN LOSE  
I CAN FIND  
I CAN SEW  
I CAN HOE  
I CAN PLANT  
I CAN GROW  
IT'S TIME...

...TO BE SOMEBODY  
TIME TO BE SOMEBODY  
TIME TO BE SOMEBODY

MILK WOMAN

(cutting him off)



Milk! Fresh Milk!

Young Jack approaches the Milk Woman.

GEORGE

Say, what do I owe you?

MILK MAN

Owe me? Owe me for what?

GEORGE

Why, you know, for fixing up that little trouble.

MILK MAN

Oh, that's what you mean. Say, you don't owe me a thin dime, not a greasy nickel. I don't take money for helping my friends. I sell milk, good milk; that's my business.

MILK WOMAN

Boy's lookin for work.

MILK MAN

What's yer name fella?

YOUNG JACK

Jack.

MILK MAN

I got me a problem collecting on some bills. I haven't the time or the patience to be dealing with all these folks on my lonesome.

The Milk Man goes back to the counter and retrieves a stack of papers.

MILK MAN cont.

You take these bills and go to these places. You come back with my money and I'll cut you in on every bill you collect on.

(leaning close)

And all the milk you can drink. Whatta yah say?

YOUNG JACK

I'll do it.

He presses the bills into Jack's hands.

Act 1 Scene 3

Inside a bar, Young Jack stands before the  
Bartender. Customers sit about drinking.

BARTENDER

No use commin' in here with that bill, kid. I ain't goin' to pay it.

YOUNG JACK

But mis-

BARTENDER

And if your boss comes up here I'll bust him in the nose. His milk is no good and he's no good.

YOUNG JACK

But mister-

BARTENDER

Now beat it!

YOUNG JACK

I know he's no good.

BARTENDER

You got that right.

YOUNG JACK

But I have to work too. I want to keep my job.

BARTENDER

Save it kid-

YOUNG JACK

If you knew just how hard my boss is you wouldn't talk to me like that, mister.

BARTENDER

Oh please-

YOUNG JACK

All you owe here is two dollars. Two dollars mister. But if you don't pay, I lose my job, I got no where sleep, nothin to eat...

A few patrons look over at Young Jack.

YOUNG JACK cont.

I'm just doin my job. He sold you milk. You bought milk. I just need the two dollars, mister. So there's no problems. Not for you I mean, but for me. Problems for me mister. My boss told me that if I didn't collect your bill today I better not show my face tomorrow.

All the customers now look at Young Jack with sorrow.

YOUNG JACK cont.

And mister, this the only job I could find. It's hard out there.

The customers nod in agreement.

BARTENDER

Oh hell, kid. I didn't think he was that bad. Here, take the lousy money.

The Bartender pays Young Jack two dollars.  
Young Jack scurries out of the bar. He heads back to the Milk Man's shop.

YOUNG JACK

Here's Mr. Finucane's two dollars.

MILK MAN

How on earth did you ever collect it?

YOUNG JACK

Oh, he just got tired and paid me, that's all.

Milk Man slides the money back to Young Jack.

MILK MAN

Well, I'll make you a present of them. You certainly earned em.

Young Jack's eyes widen as he picks up the bills. The Milk Woman pours Young Jack a tall glass of milk. Jack drinks it all up and heads out with a fresh milk mustache.

YOUNG JACK

I CAN BILL  
I CAN TAB  
I CAN BADGER  
I CAN JAB  
I'LL COLLECT  
I'LL AMASS  
I'LL INVOICE  
I'LL HARASS

(waking up Bev)

I'M GONNA BE SOMEBODY!  
I'M GONNA BE SOMEBODY!

BEV

I heard ya the first time.

YOUNG JACK

I'M GONNA BE SOMEBODY!  
I'M GONNA BE SOMEBODY!

BEV

That's truly wonderful, kid. Just great. You'll git on out here. Now why don't you run along. I've got to git me a farmer. I ain't had my whisky yet.

YOUNG JACK

I did it, I really did it!

Song ends. Ecstatic, Young Jack run's on home.

Act 1 Scene 4

Back home, Young Jack hands the money  
over to his Father who sits reading the  
paper.

YOUNG JACK

Two whole dollars, pa!

FATHER

(weary)

That's not bad.

YOUNG JACK

He said I could keep it all!

FATHER

Let me know when you want it.

YOUNG JACK

You don't mind my working?

FATHER

No. I don't mind.

YOUNG JACK

My first real job!

FATHER

You'll have to learn to work some time.

YOUNG JACK

With my own money I can keep!

FATHER

You may as well start with milk.

YOUNG JACK

Gonna buy me suit, pa.

FATHER

(no longer listening)

That's nice, Jack.

A fancy gray one.

YOUNG JACK

Okay.

FATHER

You'll see...

YOUNG JACK

Act 1 Scene 5

Young Jack and the Milk Man head down the street.

MILK MAN

If I've gathered much worldly goods in my forty plus years, I've at least learned something about the habits of women. I'll tell you, if you go in the morning you'll find them asleep; in the afternoon they're out riding or shopping; and at night they will be either too busy or too drunk. Take my advice and go about five o'clock in the evening and you will catch them at dinner, or breakfast, or whatever they call it.

They head up to an ominous looking building. The Milk Man gives Jack the milk bill.

MILK MAN

Don't you worry, kid.

YOUNG JACK

(starting to worry)

Worry about what?

MILK MAN

They don't bite...

YOUNG JACK

Bite?

MILK MAN

You can do it, if you got the gizzard.

Milk Man rings the doorbell, puts one hand on his head to secure his hat and makes a mad dash away from the building. Shocked Young Jack watches him go.

The door creaks open. A Maid stands before Young Jack, she regards him with indifference.

Young Jack fumbles with the bill.

YOUNG JACK

Good evening, I'm here to see Madam Kate Singleton about a bill.

MAID

The madam's dressing. Talk a seat.

Young Jack waits in foyer of the building.  
The Maid disappears.

Jimmy Shinn burst through the doors  
followed by two Police Officers.

JIMMY SHINN

She's still in here!

OFFICER 1

We'll take a look.

Madame Singleton appears with the Maid at  
the top of the stairs.

MADAM SINGLETON

Evenin' gentleman. What can I do for you?

JIMMY SHINN

You'll bring down that little thief is what you'll do.

OFFICER 1

Seems one a yer girls made off with this fellas wallet,

MADAM SINGLETON

Must be some sort of mistake. Can I get either of you something to drink?

JIMMY SHINN

No I don't want a lousy drink, I want my wallet. There's not mistake here.

MADAM SINGLETON

Oh, girls! Come downstairs every one of you.

Half a dozen girls appear. Jimmy Shinn  
points a finger at Julia, the youngest of the  
girls.

JIMMY SHINN

That's her right there! That's the little pick-pocket!

JULIA

(defiant)



I didn't touch your filthy wallet!

JIMMY SHINN

Why you little-

MADAM SINGLETON

Mister, are you calling my girl here a liar?

JIMMY SHINN

You're damn right I am!

OFFICER 1

(to Officer 2)

Send Mike around to the back; I'll phone for the wagon.

Young Jack looks about nervously and  
cautiously get up and heads out the door.

OFFICER 2

Where are you goin'?

YOUNG JACK

I'm going out, if you please.

OFFICER 2

Get back in there and stay there, *if you please*.

Act 1 Scene 6

Young Jack, the girls, Madam Singleton,  
Jimmy, the two Officers, and the Captain  
cram into a small office.

CAPTAIN

(to Jimmy)

Now, which girl took your money?

Jimmy points to Julia, who scowls back at  
him.

CAPTAIN

(to Julia)

Did you take that man's money?

JULIA

No!

JIMMY SHINN

I want that girl locked up. I know she got my money. I had two fifty-dollar bills rolled  
up with my other bills.

CAPTAIN

Oh, you did, eh? Why, you probably had your pocket picked on the street. It must have  
been an Emporia, Kansas, pickpocket. No Missouri dip would take his roll, extract two  
fifty-dollar bills, and put the rest back in his pocket.

(to Young Jack)

Who the hell are you?

YOUNG JACK

Me...um, well-

OFFICER 1

We searched the women, they didn't have a hundred dollars among them.

JIMMY SHINN

Of course they don't! Why would they bring it here?!

CAPTAIN

I want *you* searched.

JIMMY SHINN

Me? That's ridiculous.

CAPTAIN

Is it? You are just the kind of a yap that gets up in the middle of the night and hides his money so carefully that he has to have a policeman find it for him in the morning. Go ahead and search him.

Officer 1 and Madame Singleton share a look as Officer 1 searches the man's jacket. A bag of tobacco, some coins, and keys are also tossed out.

JIMMY SHINN

This is just ridiculous.

The pockets appear empty. Officer 1 reaches in and pulls out a handkerchief from the last coat pocket - two bills fluttered to the floor. Everyone stares at them.

Officer 1 picks up the bills and walks over to Jimmy.

OFFICER 1

Is this your money?

JIMMY SHINN

Yes.

CAPTAIN

You dirty little swine, get your property off that counter. Get out of here and back to your hog pastures before I have you locked up. Madam, ladies, sorry about the mix up.

MADAM SINGLETON

It's about time, I'm hungry enough to eat a raw dog.

OFFICER 2

What will I do with this outfit, Hayes?

OFFICER 1

Oh, charge em with drunk.

YOUNG JACK

I ain't drunk.

OFFICER 1

Vag him then.

YOUNG JACK

I ain't no vagrant neither.

OFFICER 1

(to OFFICER 2)

Take the kid upstairs: lock him up with Charlie. I'll find out about him.

YOUNG JACK

I didn't do anything, mister.

OFFICER 1

Oh, shut up.

Young Jack is hauled off.

Act 1 Scene 7

Keys rattle. A heavy metal door creaks open. Young Jack is escorted down a dark corridor. Voices call out from the darkness.

OFFICER 2

Come on, you.

PRISONER 1

Fresh fish, boys.

PRISONER 2

Hello, boy, what you-all been doin' ?

OFFICER 2

Charlie, the skipper sent up some company for you.

From inside his cell a figure eyes Jack. The figure steps forward: it's the Gray Suit Man.

GRAY SUIT MAN

I don't want to hurt your feelings, kid, but if you're lousy don't come in here, that's all.

Jack is shoved in the cell and the Officer heads off.

GRAY SUIT MAN cont.

You're beginning young. How old are you?

YOUNG JACK

Sixteen.

GRAY SUIT MAN

What are you pinched for?

YOUNG JACK

I didn't do nothin, mister.

GRAY SUIT MAN

Yeah, sure ya didn't.

YOUNG JACK

No I really didn't. I was just collecting on a bill. Police raided the place and locked me up.

(trying not to cry)

Nobody would listen to me.

GRAY SUIT MAN

Easy kid, I believe ya. That's everyday business here. Those coppers are fierce. They'll leave you here till you rot.

YOUNG JACK

I just wanna go home.

GRAY SUIT MAN

Okay. Let's see what we can do for ya.

Charlie grabs a tin cup and scrapes it across  
the bars of the door.

GRAY SUIT MAN cont.

Go down and get the desk sergeant!

OFFICER 1

What is it Charlie?

GRAY SUIT MAN cont.

It's a rotten shame to keep this kid locked up, Sam. Go down and get Hayes and tell him to let him go home. I've got plenty of money down there; charge it to me.

OFFICER 1

I'll look into it right away, Charlie.

GRAY SUIT MAN

Don't worry, kid. Have you home in no time.

YOUNG JACK

Gee thanks, mister.

GRAY SUIT MAN

*Don't mention it.* Here they are.

Officer 2 returns to the cell.

OFFICER 2

(to Young Jack)

What were you doing in that joint, anyway?

YOUNG JACK

I went in there to collect a milk bill, sir.

OFFICER 2

Where's the bill?

Young Jack hands over the bill.

OFFICER 2 cont.

Do you work for this man?

YOUNG JACK

Yes, sir.

OFFICER 1

Why in hell didn't you say so at the start?

YOUNG JACK

I tried to, sir.

OFFICER 1

Well, out you go.

CAPTAIN

There you are kid. Next time you get jammed up say something before you get thrown in. Holler before you're hurt; that's my motto.

GRAY SUIT MAN

A copper is a copper till you cut his head off. That's my motto.

CAPTAIN

Easy Charlie, no harm here.

GRAY SUIT MAN

No harm?! You scared the kid half to death. Look at em.

CAPTAIN

Oh he's alright, ain't you kid?

YOUNG JACK

(still shaken up)

I'm alright.

GRAY SUIT MAN

Just hurry up and get that kid home will ya.

CAPTAIN

Right away, Charlie.

In awe of the Gray Suit Man's authority,  
Young Jack stares at the mysterious man as  
he is led away.

*Shift.*

Young Jack wanders the streets.

YOUNG JACK

GONNA WEAR MY HAT PROPER  
GONNA LIVE LIKE I KNOW I CAN  
GONNA STRAITEN UP MY POSTURE  
TIME TO BE A MAN

MAYBE I'LL WEAR A MUSTACHE  
BRISTLY AND CUT DOWN  
(KEEP MY) HANDS OUTTA MY POCKETS  
I'M GONNA RUN THIS TOWN

WANT TO TRAVEL THE WORLD OVER  
ADVENTURE WILL BE MINE  
MONEY NEVER A PROBLEM  
WOMEN ALL THE TIME

I'LL BE CONFIDENT, RESPECTED  
THEY'LL LISTEN TO WHAT I SAY  
JUST LIKE THE MAN IN THE GRAY SUIT  
IF THEY DON'T THEN THEIR GONNA PAY

AND MAYBE SOMEDAY I'LL TRAVEL THE OPEN SEAS  
MAYBE SOMEDAY I'LL GET OUT OF THIS TOWN  
FULL OF PAIN AND MISERY  
FATHER WILL FINALLY TELL ME HE'S PROUD  
LIKE MOTHER WOULD HAVE BEEN  
IF I HAD MYSELF A SHARP GRAY SUIT....  
I'D WIN

GONNA WEAR MY HAT PROPER  
GONNA LIVE LIKE I KNOW I CAN  
GONNA STRAITEN UP MY POSTURE  
TIME TO BE A MAN



YOUNG JACK cont.

GONNA BUILD UP MY INCOME  
GONNA DO WHAT I CAN DO  
GONNA LIVE IN A POSTIVE MANNER  
LIKE THE MAN IN THE GRAY SUIT  
LIKE THE MAN IN THE GRAY SUIT  
LIKE THE MAN IN THE GRAY SUIT

Act 1 Scene 8

Young Jack stands before the Milk Man in the milk shop.

MILK MAN

You've been where?

YOUNG JACK

It wasn't my fault-

MILK MAN

Ain't my business, kid. I sell milk, good milk.

Milk man looks at Jack straight away.

MILK MAN cont.

Johnnie, I think you're on the square with me, and I'm going to be on the up and up with you. Don't let them stinking whores or them rotten coppers scare you out of a job. You go get my money.

Jack nods.

MILK MAN cont.

Well, get outta here.

*Shift.*

Madam Singleton's girls enter the dining room.

OLDER GIRLS

SHE'S MY SEETHEART, I'M HER BEAU  
SHE'S MY ANNIE, I'M HER JOE  
SOON WE'LL MARRY, NEVER TO PART  
LITTLE ANNIE ROONEY IS THE WORLD'S SWEETHEART

SHE'S MY SEETHEART, I'M HER BEAU  
SHE'S MY ANNIE, I'M HER JOE  
SOON WE'LL MARRY, NEVER TO PART  
LITTLE ANNIE ROONEY IS THE WORLD'S SWEETHEART

Young Jack enters the parlor.

MAID

Oh, Miss Kate, here's the poor milk boy.

MADAM SINGLETON O.S.

Bring him right up here, Jo, this minute. You poor boy, we are ashamed to face you after going off and forgetting you in jail. You must have dinner with us. It's ready now, and Julia wants to apologize to you. Not that it was her fault, it was just something that couldn't be helped. Those men from the country are always – ah – misplacing their money.

A small bell tinkles downstairs.

MADAM SINGLETON cont.

That means lunch, young man. Come with me. Give me a name, any name you like, I want you to meet my girls. They'll all be glad to see you again.

Madam leads Jack into the dining room.

MADAM SINGLETON

Girls, this is- uh...

YOUNG JACK

Jack.

Two of the girls offer a nod hello. The others don't even look up. Jack stands still, unsure. Julia dashes over and hugs Jack, kissing him on the cheek.

JULIA

Oh, you poor kid! I never felt so sorry for any thing in my whole life.

Jack blushes as Julia pulls him into a seat beside her.

JULIA

You from around here? Have you ever lived in the country? Can you ride a horse? How about fishing? Can ya fish? I bet ya can. Ever shoot off a revolver?

YOUNG JACK

I... uh- I can ride a horse.

MADAM SINGLETON

Julia, you have talked so much to this boy that he has forgotten what he came here for.

Madam Singleton counts out some money.

JULIA

I'm not done talking yet, Miss Kate. You know today is my day out, and I've made up my mind to have a horseback ride in the country. I've been wanting to do that ever since I came here and here is my chance. The kid here can ride, and I'll take him with me.

(to Jack)

If you'll go...

YOUNG JACK

Uhh-

JULIA

Oh, come on. I'll pay for the horses and everything, and see that you get back before dark.

YOUNG JACK

All right, I'll go.

MADAM SINGLETON

Oh I have no objection, Julia. You'll be out of mischief for one day and you're just a couple of kids, anyway.

JULIA

Let's see, you be back here at, oh, two o'clock.

YOUNG JACK

Okay-

JULIA

No, not here, that's no good. Be at the drug store down on the corner at three. You know where that is?

YOUNG JACK

Yeah.

JULIA

I'll meet you there.

YOUNG JACK

Okay.

JULIA

You'll be there?

YOUNG JACK

I said I would.

Act 1 Scene 9

Jack and Julia walk through downtown.

YOUNG JACK

You ride fast.

JULIA

I've been told.

YOUNG JACK

Hey, Julia.

JULIA

Yes.

YOUNG JACK

Did you take that man's money?

They stop walking.

YOUNG JACK cont.

I don't care if you did. I was just curious, that's all.

JULIA

Let's not talk about that, okay?

YOUNG JACK

Sure.

(trying to think of something else to say)

You got mud on your dress.

JULIA

I hate this dress.

YOUNG JACK

Looks nice on you.

JULIA

I hate every stitch of clothes on my back.

YOUNG JACK

Oh.

JULIA

You know why?

YOUNG JACK

No.

JULIA

Cuz every one of em means a different man.

YOUNG JACK

I don't understand.

JULIA

You wouldn't understand it even if I told you. You're only a kid.

YOUNG JACK

Tell me anyway, Julia.

JULIA

What's the use? It's all the same. Everyone has their story.

YOUNG JACK

I'd like to hear yours.

JULIA

You really want me to tell you about it? What a tough time I've had?

YOUNG JACK

If you'd be willing to tell me, I'd do my best to listen.

JULIA

They're all dead to the world in that house. God, what a place!

(beat)

It's getting late. I should get back.

Julia starts to head back. Young Jack  
doesn't move.

JULIA cont.

Aren't you gonna walk me?

YOUNG JACK

Why do you stay there, Julia? If ya hate it so much?

JULIA

It ain't that simple, kid.

YOUNG JACK

But why?

JULIA

Where else can I go?

Young Jack pulls bills out of his pocket.

YOUNG JACK

Take my money.

JULIA

Why, you poor kid, I wouldn't take your money on a bet. Don't you know you're the only human being I've met since I left home that hasn't tried to do me some kind of dirt?

(beat)

WHEN I WAS TOO YOUNG TO UNDERSTAND  
A GROWN MAN THOUGHT ME PRETTY  
HE LEFT WHEN I TOLD HIM I WAS PREGNANT  
FATHER SENT ME TO THE CITY

MOTHER GAVE ME A SOFT COTTON DRESS  
AND WALKED ME TO THE TRAIN  
SHE TOLD ME TO HURRY BACK REAL SOON  
BUT I NEVER SAW HER AGAIN

I KNOW IT'S A TERRIBLE THING TO SAY  
I WAS GLAD WHEN THE BABY DIED  
THE NURSE TOLD ME IT WAS A GIRL  
I CAN'T SAY THAT I CRIED

A MAN CAN GO OUT IN THE STREET  
WITH NO COAT OR HAT OR NAME  
BUT LET A WOMAN TRY IT  
IT'S JUST NOT THE SAME

A MAN WILL ALWAYS GET WHAT HE WANTS  
WHEN HE HAS WHAT YOU NEED IN HIS HANDS  
AND A GIRL ALONE WITHOUT A HOME  
HAS NO CHANCE

FATHER NEVER SENT FOR ME  
I DON'T KNOW IF HE KNEW  
AND SOMEONE STOLE MY SOFT COTTON DRESS  
WHAT WAS I TO DO?

JULIA cont.

WHEN I WAS WELL ENOUGH TO LEAVE  
THE DOC FOUND ME A PLACE TO STAY  
HE CAME TO MY BED LATE THAT NIGHT  
WOULDN'T LEAVE TILL HE HAD HIS WAY

ONE OF THE INTERNS GAVE ME THESE SHOES  
HE WAS A DIRTY LITTLE BEAST  
THE HOSPITAL COOK GOT ME THIS SHIRT  
I JUST WANTED TO BE RELEASED

A MAN CAN GO OUT IN THE STREET  
WITH NO COAT OR HAT OR NAME  
BUT LET A WOMAN TRY IT  
IT'S JUST NOT THE SAME

A MAN WILL ALWAYS GET WHAT HE WANTS  
WHEN HE HAS WHAT YOU NEED IN HIS HANDS  
AND A GIRL ALONE WITHOUT A HOME  
HAS NO CHANCE

I WAS RAGGED AND HUNGRY  
I'D SUFFERED FOR MY SIN  
I HEADED DOWN TO THE RIVER  
AND SWORE I'D WALK RIGHT IN  
THE OFFICERS BROUGHT ME TO MISS KATE  
NOW THERE'S A BED ALONG WITH THESE CLOTHES  
I PAY HER AND SHE PAYS THE POLICE  
THAT'S HOW THE STORY GOES

Other Women appear around town.

JULIA cont.

FATHER, FATHER  
I'VE MADE SUCH A MESS  
MOTHER, MOTHER  
THIS IS NOT MY DRESS

JULIA and OTHER WOMEN

FATHER, (FATHER) FATHER (FATHER)  
I'VE MADE SUCH A MESS  
MOTHER (MOTHER), MOTHER (MOTHER)  
THIS IS NOT MY DRESS



JULIA and OTHER WOMEN

FATHER, (FATHER) FATHER (FATHER)  
I'VE MADE SUCH A MESS (MADE SUCH A MESS OF IT)  
MOTHER (MOTHER), MOTHER (MOTHER)  
THIS IS NOT MY DRESS

YOUNG JACK

I got forty dollars saved up. It's at my room. I'll help you find a job. I know I could.

JULIA

Where would we go?

YOUNG JACK

Where do you wanna go?

JULIA

Anywhere's better than here.

YOUNG JACK

So let's do it...

A train passes through town. Julia and  
Young Jack watch it intently.

Act 1 Scene 10

In the hotel Young Jack finishes packing his bags. His Father watches.

FATHER

Guess you'll want your money now.

YOUNG JACK

I reckon so.

Jack's Father gives him his cash and looks at him.

FATHER

Jack, do you know what you are?

YOUNG JACK

What?

FATHER

You are a pimp. And you've got a gold mine; that dame's a money-getter. She's young and healthy and good for years.

YOUNG JACK

I'll be going now.

FATHER

Well, you'll be what you'll be, I cannot help or hinder you.

Young Jack exits. Old Jack watches.

OLD JACK

Those were his last words to me. I have always remembered them and their ring of fatality.

*Shift.*

Young Jack waits on the street outside the brothel. He looks up at the small rooms. Through one of the windows, Julia slowly brushes her hair in the mirror. An Older Man sits beside her smoking.

Jack watches the scene in the window.  
Jack's eye narrow as the older man pulls  
Julia to him.

Jack swallows his hurt and heads off down  
the street.

OLD JACK cont.

For years I kept a sharp eye out for Julia. It would be some time before we crossed paths  
again.

Act 1 Scene 11

The town fades away as Young Jack makes his way down a dirt road.

OLD JACK cont.

Sundown found me miles away on a country road, walking westward. It was too late for me to turn back. Everything, all possibilities, laid straight ahead.

Young Jack stops as figures down in a ravine look up at him.

BUM 1

Hey kid.

Young Jack stops walking.

BUM 1 cont.

Got a match?

Young Jack shakes his head no.

BUM 2

Where you from, kid?

YOUNG JACK

The city.

BUM 2

How long you been on the road?

YOUNG JACK

This is my first day.

BUM 1

Got any people?

YOUNG JACK

They're all dead.

BUM 2

Where you goin?

YOUNG JACK

Out west.

BUM 1  
Got any pennies?

YOUNG JACK  
I got a few.

BUM 1  
If we was in the city I'd get myself a four-bit micky purty pronto.

BUM 2  
Come on down, kid. Don't be leery, we're only a couple of harmless bindle stiffs.

Cautiously, Jack makes his way down to the  
Bums.

BUM 1  
Got any cans?

YOUNG JACK  
No.

BUM 1  
This is a pretty snide jungle. Throw your feet and get some wood for the fire before it  
gets too dark.

BUM 2  
We'll have a fire and a can of Java, anyway. See if you can find a pan.

BUM 1  
What in hell do you want a pan for? Are you going to fry some water?

BUM 2  
NOT SO FAST, BROTHER  
GOT A GUMP IN ME BINDLE

BUM 1  
YOU WITH A GUMP  
AND ME WITH A KINDLE

BUM 2  
WASH OUT THIS PAN, KID  
BRING IT BACK HALF FULL  
LIGHT UP THIS SMOKE, KID  
HELP YOURSELF TO A SHORT PULL

BUM 1

SIT BY THE FIRE, KID  
GET SOMETHING TO EAT

BUM 2

IF YOU WAS A DINGBAT  
WE'D SET YOU BACK TO THE STREET  
BUT YOU SEEM ALRIGHT, KID  
YOU'RE WELCOME TO STAY

BUM 1

WE'LL BE GETTING BACK ON THE ROAD, KID  
ONE OF THESE DAYS

BOTH

YOU'RE WELCOME TO TRAVEL  
WITH US IF YOU LIKE  
JUNGLE-UP FOR A MONTH  
THE FRUIT'S GETTIN RIPE

YOU'RE WELCOME TO TRAVEL  
WITH US IF YOU LIKE  
JUNGLE-UP FOR A MONTH  
THE FRUIT'S GETTIN RIPE

YOUNG JACK

I passed by a farm house, I could buy us some bread

BUM 1

Did you say buy? Oh, it's cats like you.....

BUM 2

THEY'LL EXPECT THAT MONEY  
THEY WANT US TO PAY  
IT'S LIFE ON THE ROAD, KID  
DON'T YOU KNOW WHAT TO SAY

YOUNG JACK

I don't.

BUM 1

GO DOWN TO THAT HOUSE  
TELL THE WOMAN YOU'RE SICK

TELL HER YOU IS STARVING

YOUNG JACK

Is this some kind of trick?

BUM 2

TELL HER YOU'S RUN AWAY  
LIL' BROTHER'S NOT WELL  
TELL HER HE CAN'T MOVE  
THAT HE SLIPPED AND HE FELL

BUM 1

TELL HER YOU'S HEADIN' HOME  
JUST HAD QUITE A SCARE  
THE TRAIN HAD A CRASH  
YOU LOST ALL YOUR FARE

BUM 2

You're a decent-lookin' kid; should be a connecter

BOTH

YOU'RE WELCOME TO TRAVEL  
WITH US IF YOU LIKE  
JUNGLE-UP FOR A MONTH  
THE FRUIT'S GETTIN RIPE

YOU'RE WELCOME TO TRAVEL  
WITH US IF YOU LIKE  
JUNGLE-UP FOR A MONTH  
THE FRUIT'S GETTIN RIPE

BUM 1

Next fall we'll make the poultice route.

YOUNG JACK

What's that?

BOTH

THAT'S SOUTHERN UTAH  
LAND OF MILK AND HONEY  
EGGS AND FRESH BREAD  
PLENTY OF MONEY

ALL

(Jack joins in on harmonica)

YOU'RE WELCOME TO TRAVEL  
WITH US IF YOU LIKE  
JUNGLE-UP FOR A MONTH  
THE FRUIT'S GETTIN RIPE

YOU'RE WELCOME TO TRAVEL  
WITH US IF YOU LIKE  
JUNGLE-UP FOR A MONTH  
THE FRUIT'S GETTIN RIPE

YOU'RE WELCOME TO TRAVEL  
WITH US IF YOU LIKE  
JUNGLE-UP FOR A MONTH  
THE FRUIT'S GETTIN RIPE

YOU'RE WELCOME TO TRAVEL  
WITH US IF YOU LIKE  
JUNGLE-UP FOR A MONTH  
THE FRUIT'S GETTIN RIPE

The fire has burned down and the group  
prepares to go to sleep.

BUM 1 cont.

Where did you say you was goin' to?

YOUNG JACK

Oh, just west, anywhere.

BUM 1

Looks like we got ourselves a young dreamer.

Bum 2 tosses Young Jack a blanket.

BUM 2

Yeah, well sweet dreams kid.

Young Jack pulls the blanket over him and  
looks up at the starry sky.

*Shift.*



As the sun begins to rise police raid the  
bum's campsite. They are all hauled off.

Act 1 Scene 12

Young Jack and the two Bums stand before  
a Judge.

JUDGE

What have you there, Mike?

COURT OFFICER

Three bums, judge.

JUDGE

Are you guilty or not guilty?

YOUNG JACK

Guilty of what-

BUM 1

We're all guilty, judge.

BUM 2

Guilty an' hungry.

JUDGE

Well, Mike, give the big bums ten days and the little bum five.

YOUNG JACK

Judge, you can't call me a vagrant.

JUDGE

What's this?

YOUNG JACK

I have twenty dollars down in the jail office.

JUDGE

Do you?

YOUNG JACK

Yes, I do. So I'd like to know what you'll be charging with?

BUM 1

You ask a lot of dam' fool questions, kid.

JUDGE

Changed my mind, Mike. Give the little bum Fifteen days on the chain gang. Next case!

Young Jack and company are dragged off.

Act 1 Scene 13

Young Jack and other prisoners are  
assembled by guards for a chain gang.  
Young Jack is paired up with Smiler.

PRISONER

Who's the fresh fish, Smiler?

SMILER

Another vag.

YOUNG JACK

I ain't no vag.

SMILER

Forget it, kid. Your fifteen days will be in before your name's dry on the commitment.  
I'm goin' out this afternoon and out of this man's town, too,

YOUNG JACK

You're days are up?

SMILER

Something like that.

GUARD

Chain gang!

PRISONERS

POLICE OFFICER, HOW CAN IT BE?  
YOU CAN 'REST EVERYBODY BUT CRUEL STACK O' LEE  
THAT BAD MAN, OH, CRUEL STACK O' LEE

POLICE OFFICER, HOW CAN IT BE?  
YOU CAN 'REST EVERYBODY BUT CRUEL STACK O' LEE  
THAT BAD MAN, OH, CRUEL STACK O' LEE

SMILER

You wanna beat it today?

YOUNG JACK

Do I wanna what?

SMILER

Where you headed?

YOUNG JACK

West.

SMILER

There'll be a train through here in a few minutes.

YOUNG JACK

But what about the-

SMILER

They won't stop and search the cars, mess up the schedule just for us.

PRISONERS

POLICE OFFICER, HOW CAN IT BE?

YOU CAN 'REST EVERYBODY BUT CRUEL STACK O' LEE

THAT BAD MAN, OH, CRUEL STACK O' LEE

A train is heard approaching the town.

SMILER

There she goes. You in kid?

YOUNG JACK

What? Now?

SMILER

Good a time as any as I see it.

YOUNG JACK

But my coat's in the jail.

SMILER

We'll kick in the first private house that looks good.

YOUNG JACK

Kick in the private-

SMILER

Now!

Young Jack and Smiler make a mad dash for it. Guards pursue them but soon give up the chase.

PRISONERS

POLICE OFFICER, HOW CAN IT BE?

YOU CAN 'REST EVERYBODY BUT CRUEL STACK O' LEE

THAT BAD MAN, OH, CRUEL STACK O' LEE

POLICE OFFICER, HOW CAN IT BE?

YOU CAN 'REST EVERYBODY BUT CRUEL STACK O' LEE

THAT BAD MAN, OH, CRUEL STACK O' LEE

Young Jack and Smiler arrive at the train tracks.

SMILER

That's doin' time, kid, what!

*Shift.*

Young Jack and Smiler wait in some bushes as a Man and Woman step out for the night. Smiler confidently walks up to the door and rings the doorbell. He nods to Young Jack and they jog around the side of the house. Smiler opens a side window and they climb on in.

SMILER

Look around for some chuck, kid, and stay right there till I come back.

Nervously, Young Jack searched the kitchen for food. He carefully takes some items for the road.

A loud thud is heard and Young Jack jumps. Smiler returns smiling with a bundle of clothes. They head out.

*Shift.*

Young Jack and Smiler sit in a train car eating. Smiler rummages through the take.

SMILER

That was a snide little caper we cut back there and I wouldn't have touched it only you had to have a coat.

Smiler tosses Young Jack a coat and he puts it on.

SMILER cont.

How's it fit?

YOUNG JACK

Perfect!

SMILER

How do you like this racket kid?

YOUNG JACK

It's great. How long have you been doing it?

SMILER

Oh, a couple of years. Ever since the coppers run me out of my hometown, Detroit. How would you like to be a prowler, kid?

YOUNG JACK

I think I'd like it.

SMILER

All right. When we get to Salt Lake I'll show you the real thing.

YOUNG JACK

How long till we make Salt Lake?

SMILER

About a week at this rate.

Young Jack pulls a watch out of the bounty.

YOUNG JACK

Nice watch.

Smiler takes it and throws it off the train.

YOUNG JACK cont.

Hey, what's the big idea?

SMILER

That watch would get us five years, kid, if we got grabbed with it, and it ain't worth two dollars. We've got to plant the rest a this. Can't take chances luggin' it around. They may not miss it till tomorrow, or they may miss it already. Anyway we'll sure be stuck up and frisked at Evanston. All we have to do is tell the truth, say we rode this rattler out of Cheyenne and never left the yards at Rock Springs. They won't hold us.

Old Jack appears in the train car.

OLD JACK

This adventure fascinated me. I gave no thought to the burglary. It seemed right that I should have a coat and food. My money was behind in the jail. I couldn't buy them. So I had stolen. And somehow I felt satisfied, as if I had got even with somebody.

SMILER

Say, take off that coat and let me look at it.

Smiler finds the owner's name on a piece of white cloth sewed in the inside pocket. He rips it out and tosses it.

SMILER cont.

You never can be too careful, kid. Here you are walking around wearing the best evidence against us. We ought to have looked at that before. I ain't going back on that man's chain gang. Not me!

YOUNG JACK

Me neither!

OLD JACK

How could a boy help admiring such wisdom?

SMILER

If the bulls grab us off, kid, you say nothing; I'll talk and tell them who we are and where we're going. You listen, that's all.

Young Jack nods.

SMILER cont.

Take a rest for an hour, we'll switch trains at the burg. Then, instead of going to Salt Lake, we'll ride the freight over the cut-off to Pocatello and I'll get the coin on that junk in an hour from Mary.

YOUNG JACK

And who's Mary?



SMILER

Wait till you see her. She'll buy anything from a barrel of whisky to a baby carriage.

Young Jack takes a rest as they ride on  
through the night.

OLD JACK

A few words about Mary, or as she was more lovingly known, Salt Chunk Mary. She was about forty years of age when I met her, hard-faced and heavy-handed. Her hair was the color of a sunburned brick, and her small blue eyes glinted like ice under a March sun.

Act 1 Scene 14

We are outside Mary's place. Smiler and Young Jack approach the door.

OLD JACK cont.

Salt Chunk Mary's principal business was selling wine, women, and song to the railroad men and gamblers. But to us thieves, Mary was a friend.

Smiler knocks on the door. A Swedish Woman answers.

SMILER

Is Mary home?

SWEDISH WOMAN

Aye tank you have bad luck. Miss Mary she bane on big yamboree.

SMILER

A jamboree huh?

YOUNG JACK

What's that?

SMILER

Let's see if we can catch up to her. You're not gonna wanna miss this, kid.

YOUNG JACK

Miss what?

SMILER

C'mon.

They head off as Old Jack returns.

OLD JACK

In Pocatello, as in every other Western town in those days, it was the correct custom and usage for sporting people to go on a big jamboree once or twice a year. If the celebrant got hold of a bunch of easy money he or she "went on a tear" to celebrate the good luck. If the luck got bad, the way to change it was to go out and get drunk.

*Shift.*

Smiler looks over at a saloon with Several  
Drunks passed out in front. He signals Jack  
to keep walking.

OLD JACK cont.

The length of these celebrations was determined by the size of the party's bankroll or the  
strength of his or her constitution. Salt Chunk Mary was in a category all her own.

ALL

WHEN MARY GOES ON  
A JAMBOREE  
THERE AIN'T NO LAWS  
AND THE LIQUOR'S FREE  
IT'S SALT CHUNK MARY  
SALT CHUNK MARY

WHEN MARY GOES ON  
A JAMBOREE  
THERE AIN'T NO LAWS  
AND THE LIQUOR'S FREE  
IT'S SALT CHUNK MARY  
SALT CHUNK MARY

IF YOU OWN A SALOON  
YOU BETTER LOCK YOUR DOOR  
CUZ MARY GON' DRINK  
AND DRINK SOME MORE

BUMS AND RAGTAGS  
ALL GET SICKER  
CUZ SALT CHUNK MARY  
CAN CARRY HER LIQUOR

WHEN SALT CHUNK MARY  
GOES ON A TOOT  
THE MARSHAL GETS LOST  
TIMID FOLLOW SUIT

YOU'LL BE LEGLESS  
ALL THE QUICKER  
FINISH YOUR DRINK  
DON'T TRY TO TRICK HER, NO...

Young Jack and Smiler stand across from a  
half filled saloon. Customers drink and chat  
with some of the Working Girls.

Salt Chunk Mary shouts incoherently and enters the saloon.

SMILER

Here she is.

YOUNG JACK

What's she doing?

SMILER

Just watch.

They all follow her inside.

Mary sizes up the place and stomps over to the bar.

MARY  
(slurred)

All your drinks.

BARTENDER

You want what?

MARY

All your drinks!

Mary chucks a bottle straight at the bartender's head. It barely misses him shatters against the wall. He quickly gives her what she wants.

ALL

WHEN MARY GOES ON  
A JAMBOREE  
THERE AIN'T NO LAWS  
AND THE LIQUOR'S FREE  
IT'S SALT CHUNK MARY  
SALT CHUNK MARY

WHEN MARY GOES ON  
A JAMBOREE  
THERE AIN'T NO LAWS  
AND THE LIQUOR'S FREE

ALL cont.

IT'S SALT CHUNK MARY  
SALT CHUNK MARY

HER BANK - ROLL  
HAS NO BOTTOM  
SHE CAN OUT - DRINK  
GOMORRAH AND SODOM

SHE'LL MARCH THROUGH TOWN  
CONSTITUTION FLAWLESS  
YOU WOULDN'T BELIEVE IT  
UNLESS YOU SAW THIS

SHE POURS DRINK  
IN EVERY MOUTH AROUND  
SHE'LL MAKE EVERY BAR  
AND SALOON IN TOWN

WHEN MARY GOES ON  
A JAMBOREE  
THERE AIN'T NO LAWS  
THERE AIN'T NO LAWS

Mary stands on the bar singing and pouring  
liquor onto the patrons and girls alike.

MARY

WHEN I GO OUT  
ON A TEAR  
IF YOU NOT MY FRIEND  
YOU BEST BEWARE

I'LL SMASH YOUR WINDOWS  
PULL OUT YOUR HAIR  
I'LL BURN YOUR MONEY, BABY  
CUZ I JUST DON'T CARE

Mary hops to the ground and swiftly pulls  
the bar over sending it crashing to the floor.

MARY cont

I PREFER ACTIONS  
OVER WORDS  
I DON'T LET UP  
HAVEN'T YOU HEARD?

SHE'S OUR MARY  
SHE STAYS TRUE  
YOU DRINK WITH MARY  
FRIENDSHIPS RENEWED

SMILER

Mary throws a bottle across the room

WHEN MARY GOES ON  
A JAMBOREE  
THERE AIN'T NO LAWS  
AND THE LIQUOR'S FREE  
IT'S SALT CHUNK MARY  
SALT CHUNK MARY

ALL

WHEN MARY GOES ON  
A JAMBOREE  
THERE AIN'T NO LAWS  
AND THE LIQUOR'S FREE  
IT'S SALT CHUNK MARY  
SALT CHUNK MARY

Mary shrieks and heads to the next bar.  
They follow off into the night.

Act 1 Scene 15

The following morning. Young Jack and Smiler finish breakfast.

Hung-over, Mary enters the kitchen.

SALT CHUNK MARY

Hey Smiler! When'd y'all get in? Did ya eat?  
(pouring a glass of whiskey)  
Hair a the dog boys!

SMILER

Got a few things here.

Smiler shows Mary the stolen goods and she appraises them.

SALT CHUNK MARY

Seventy dollars.

SMILER

Good, then we'll take them in small bills, Ms. Mary!  
(to Young Jack)  
Let's go in and buy a few bottles of beer for the girls, just by the way of no harm.

SALT CHUNK MARY

(to Smiler)

No, don't drag that kid in there - and here's something else, listen: I guess that kid is all right or he wouldn't be with you. If I'm grabbed with this junk I'll rot in jail before I put the finger on you, and if either of you gets grabbed-  
(to Young Jack)  
and thinks he can get a light jolt by turning me in, he's wrong. I'll throw it in the river, and he can rot in jail. You got that?

YOUNG JACK

Yes ma'am.

Mary counts out the cash for Smiler and heads out.

SMILER

That's too bad, she got some nice lookin girls too.

YOUNG JACK

Yeah?

But that's Mary for ya.	SMILER
I had a woman back home.	YOUNG JACK
You left her?	SMILER
I guess I did.	YOUNG JACK
You guess?	SMILER
You know how women can be...	YOUNG JACK
Can't say that I do.	SMILER
Yeah, me neither...	YOUNG JACK



Act 1 Scene 16

From some bushes, Young Jack and Smiler  
look up into a sleepy house.

YOUNG JACK

Everything all right now?

SMILER

Oh, sure, everything's all right – just like Denmark.

Lights flash as a vehicle passes by. The  
boys duck down to avoid being seen.

YOUNG JACK

Should we come back another night.

SMILER

A few more minutes, kid, and we'll get busy.

YOUNG JACK

You sure bout this?

SMILER

Sure I'm sure. Don't forget, in case anything happens we meet back at the station.

YOUNG JACK

I know.

SMILER

I just wish this stool-pigeon moon wasn't so bright tonight.

Smiler walks over to a window and tries to  
open it. It's unlocked but seems to be  
jammed. Smiler wiggles it, waits, wiggles it  
some more.

Finally it opens. Smiler looks back at  
Young Jack and winks. He starts to climb in  
when there is a blinding flash of fire and the  
deadly roar of a rifle.

Glass shatters to the ground and a woman  
shrieks.

Smiler staggers back clutching his throat.  
He removes his hand momentarily and it is  
covered in blood.

Young Jack rushes over to him.

YOUNG JACK

Smiler? You okay?

Houses around are waking up.

YOUNG JACK cont.

Let's get outa here, Smiler.

Smiler drops to his knees. Young Jack tries  
to help him to his feet, but Smiler stumbles  
over, covered now in blood.

YOUNG JACK

Smiler? C'mon! Smiler...

Young Jack tries to revive Smiler.

Police can be heard rushing over.

Young Jack tries to drag Smiler out of there.

*Shift.*

A courtroom. With a dour expression,  
Young Jack waits for his ruling from the  
Judge.

JUDGE

Anything for the defense?

JACK'S LAWYER

We waive our defense.

Shocked, Young Jack glares at his lawyer.

JUDGE

Defendant held to await trial.

The Baliff approached Young Jack.

BAILIFF

You've been indicted by the grand jury; today you go up to the 'big house'.  
Young feller, I don't put irons on none of 'em.

(tapping his gun)

If you want ter run, that's yer business.

A gavel bangs.

*Shift.*

Young Jack alone in a cell.

YOUNG JACK

YOUR BLOOD'S ON MY HANDS, SMILER  
YOUR BLOOD'S ON MY FACE  
MY SHIRT AND MY COAT ARE DRENCHED  
MY BOOTS ARE STAINED

WHAT AM I TO DO, SMILER?  
WHERE AM I TO GO?  
IF THIS IS THE LIFE, SMILER  
I DON'T WANT ANY MORE

FATHER, I'M THINKING THINGS THROUGH  
FOR THE FIRST TIME  
AND I HEARTILY WISH MYSELF BACK HOME WITH YOU  
I WAS YEARNING FOR ADVENTURE  
BUT ADVENTURE ONLY BROUGHT ME TO THIS  
I AM TIRED, AFRAID, AND HUNGRY  
DESPERATE AND HELPLESS

FATHER I'LL GET MYSELF OUT OF THIS SOMEHOW  
I'M QUITTING THE ROAD AND I'M HEADING BACK  
I HAVE NO TIES HERE TO BIND ME  
BUT I COULDN'T LEAVE THAT MAN TO DIE ALONE

YOUR BLOOD'S ON MY HANDS, SMILER  
YOUR BLOOD'S ON MY FACE  
WHAT AM I TO DO, SMILER  
NOW I'M STUCK IN THIS PLACE

YOUR BLOOD'S ON MY HANDS, SMILER  
YOUR BLOOD'S ON MY FACE  
WHAT AM I TO DO, FATHER

YOUNG JACK cont.

NOW I'M STUCK IN THIS PLACE

YOUR BLOOD'S ON MY HANDS  
YOUR BLOOD'S ON MY FACE  
WHAT AM I TO DO, MOTHER  
NOW I'M STUCK IN THIS PLACE

End of Act One.

Act 2 Scene 1

OLD JACK

You start doing time the minute the handcuffs are on your wrists. The first day you are locked up is the hardest, and the last day is the easiest. There comes a feeling of helplessness when the prison gates swallow you up – cut you off from the sunshine and flowers out in the world – but that feeling soon wears away if you have guts.

Lights spread to reveal a prison cell.  
Prisoners lie about. Young Jack sits  
nervously in the back.

VOICE

Vag these two 'hypos,'

SHORTY O.S.

I'll croak, officer, if you take it away from me.

VOICE

Throw him in!

The cell is opened and Shorty and Paulie are  
shoved inside. The cell is locked.

SHORTY

He got my plant, Paulie, but you saved yours, didn't you, Paulie? Gee, Paulie, but you're a fox.

PAULIE

Never mind that, you don't have to 'Paulie' me. You're in with what 'gow' I've got. Let's bang it up before they come in and take it away from us.

Paulie removes an eye-dropper with a  
hypodermic needle soldered to it with  
sealing wax, and a small paper of morphine  
in a little tin box. He prepares a shot.

SHORTY

(to Young JACK)

Hey kid, gotta smoke?

YOUNG JACK

Me?

SHORTY

Do ya?

YOUNG JACK

No, sorry.

SHORTY

Just think, Paulie, what a four-bit piece would do for us. What a life-saver! We'd both get a 'sixer' in the morning if we go in front of the judge with our teeth rattlin' so we can't put up a talk. If I had a decent shot for the morning I could talk him out of it.

PAULIE

And that rat, Finnerty, the trusty, has got a ton of it out there to sell, but he wouldn't give us a jolt if we had the horrors.

YOUNG JACK

You can buy stuff in here?

PAULIE

Can you? Why, that trusty would peddle you a six-shooter and a road map if you had the coin, and then snitch on you to the desk sergeant, the rat.

SHORTY

I think we'd better cook up a shot just to see if the stuff is all right. That Finnerty would peddle you chloride of lime if he happened to run out of 'morph."

PAULIE

He ain't got a dime.

Shorty shoots up. A Slick looking prisoner wakes up and groans. He spots Paulie and snaps in his face.

SLICK

Hey you.

PAULIE

(smacking Slick's hand away)

What?

SLICK

Gimme a match.

PAULIE

Excuse me?

SLICK

I'll be out of here in an hour, I'll send you in anything you want. I'm a quick connector. I can get a ten-dollar piece before I get out of the block – sucker born every minute, you know.

PAULIE

Yeah, I know, I'm sorry for them poor suckers. They're all asleep down in the Palace Hotel and you're up here in the can. There's one born every minute, all right, but there's two wise guys going to jail every minute, an' beggin' matches.

SHORTY

That last shot didn't hit me right; we'd better cook up another an' begin to get straightened up for court.

VOICE

On the gate!

PAULIE

Already?

SHORTY

If I get six months they'll have to hang them on me. I ain't going to reach out an' grab them

VOICE

*On the gate!*

The prisoners stand and head out onto the yard.

Act 2 Scene 2

A prison yard. Prisoners walk about the yard. A Tough Prisoner approaches him.

TOUGH

Kid, that was tough about Smiler.

YOUNG JACK

You knew him?

TOUGH

Sure I knew him. Saw your picture in the paper. You'll be alright in here, you're folks yourself or you wouldn't have been with Smiler. C'mere.

TOUGH cont.

This party, is one of the 'Johnson family.'

YOUNG JACK

Who are the Johnsons?

TOUGH

(to another prisoner about Jack)

He's good people and I want to get him fixed up for a cell with the right folks.

OTHER PRISONER

Why don't you go out and see George and his outfit? There's an empty bunk in their cell.

FOOT AND A HALF GEORGE

(overhearing this)

Sure, put him in with us. If you don't they'll only stick some lame cat in there and we'd have to throw him out in the middle of the night.

TOUGH

See kid, I'll put you in with the best people.

YOUNG JACK

The best people?

TOUGH

You know, good people.

YOUNG JACK

Good at what?



TOUGH

Listen, kid...

TOUGH cont.

GOOD PEOPLE PAY RENT  
GOOD PEOPLE HAVE FRIENDS  
GOOD PEOPLE DON'T BEG OR BORROW  
THEN TRY TO MAKE AMENDS

GOOD PEOPLE IS FOLKS  
BETTER THAN THE REST  
YOU'LL KNOW GOOD PEOPLE  
WHEN YOU'RE WITH THE BEST

PRISONERS

(one prisoner/line at a time)

A FRESH BUCKET OF MILK  
LOAVES OF SOFT HOT BREAD  
A NICE, JUICY STEAK  
A MAGAZINE FOR BED

THE PRISON'S BEST CELLS  
TWO BUNKS ON EACH SIDE  
A MATTRESS, A BLANKET  
CLEAN STRAW FOR YOUR HIDE

ALL PRISONERS

GOOD PEOPLE IS FOLKS  
BETTER THAN THE REST  
AN OIL LAMP  
A CIGARETTE  
WHEN YOU'RE WITH THE BEST

GOOD PEOPLE STAY TRUE  
AND CLOSE TO THE CHEST  
COMISSARY  
RATIONS  
WHEN YOU'RE WITH THE BEST

PRISONERS

(one prisoner/line at a time)

A JOHNSON IS A YEGG  
STREET LAW IS A MUST  
YOUR WORD IS ALL YOU REALLY GOT  
A THIEF YOU CAN TRUST

PRISONERS cont.

A YEGG'S A MAN WITH HONOR  
THE CODE OF THE STREET  
REPUATION, CHARACTER  
NOT NO DIRTY CHEAT

ALL PRISONERS

GOOD PEOPLE IS FOLKS  
BETTER THAN THE REST  
COMMUNITY  
A FAMILY  
WHEN YOU'RE WITH THE BEST

GOOD PEOPLE STAY TRUE  
AND CLOSE TO THE CHEST

TOUGH

LOYALTY  
FRANTERNITY

ALL PRISONERS

WHEN YOU'RE WITH THE BEST  
WHEN YOU'RE WITH THE BEST

Old Jack appears.

OLD JACK

I must stop briefly to describe my three cellmates, all persistent and professional criminals with great influence on my after life.

Three figures appear in shadows.

OLD JACK cont,

A name on a prison register doesn't usually mean anything. I never learned much of their family names or birthplaces, to ask about those things in the underworld is to invite suspicion. All criminals conceal them carefully and resent questions. This much I know.

George, is illuminated.

OLD JACK

George was known on the road and to the police as "Foot-and-a-half George" because of an injury to one of his feet that cost him a couple of toes and caused a slight limp. This grizzled old yegg was a by-product of our Civil War.

OLD JACK cont.

Apprentice to a village blacksmith, he was drafted into the army, where he learned the disruptive force of powder, and many other things useful to him in his profession of safe breaking. He traveled from one safe to the next and always favored post offices.

FOOT AND A HALF GEORGE

(to the Audience)

You're a cinch to get some coin out of every P.O. You can peddle the stamps anywhere at sixty or eighty per cent and they can't be identified. The limit for a P.O. is five years and you never get that if you use a little judgment. Yeah, I'm strong for the government. I ain't done a day's work outside of prison since the army. I knock'em open like ripe watermelons!

Another of the, The Sanctimonious Kid, is illuminated.

OLD JACK

The Sanctimonious Kid's head was the finest, his face the handsomest, and his poise the surest of any man I ever knew, as if he might have been a minister or divinity student. But there was a hard look about his mouth, something in his jaw that suggested the butcher. Whether it was his appearance or his careful manner of speech that got him his moniker, I never knew.

THE SANCTIMONIOUS KID

(to the Audience)

It's a crooked game, kid, but you have to think straight. Be as positive yourself as you like, but no positive clothes and no off calibers like forty-one. I want the same gun that everybody else has. I don't want to shoot anybody, but if I do they won't dig a forty-one caliber slug out of him and find a forty-one caliber gun on me.

The final man, Soldier Johnnie, is revealed.

OLD JACK

"Soldier Johnnie," who had served a term in the army, was the youngest of the three. He was an industrious and trustworthy yegg who made his living serving as "target" for the yegg mobs that preyed on country banks. The "target" is the most reliable man in the mob. It's his job to carry the heavy artillery and stand off the natives while the others get the coin, and then to cover the get-away. To him is given the job of sticking up the town bull if he appears while the others are inside.

Johnnie says nothing, just nods.

OLD JACK cont.

Such were my companions, guides, friends and philosophers, day and night, till the day of my trial, which soon came.

FOOT AND A HALF GEORGE

What have they got on you, kid?

THE SANCTIMONIOUS KID

Once smiler went, you shouldn't a stuck around like that.

FOOT AND A HALF GEORGE

The kid's got heart.

THE SANCTIMONIOUS KID

The kid and his heart are in a load a trouble.

FOOT AND A HALF GEORGE

And you've made no statement yet?

YOUNG JACK

No.

FOOT AND A HALF GEORGE

Not even to the shyster?

YOUNG JACK

Not even to the shyster.

FOOT AND A HALF GEORGE

He'll beat that case.

THE SANCTIMONIOUS KID

Sure he will. Judge Powers can beat that case before lunch any day.

SOLDIER JOHNNIE

How's he going to get the judge to defend him? He hasn't a dime, and you're talking about the best lawyer in the state.

FOOT AND A HALF GEORGE

The judge will take this case for a hundred; it's only an hour's work for him.

SOLDIER JOHNNIE

You think the kids got that kinda coin?

YOUNG JACK

I don't have any coins, sir.

FOOT AND A HALF GEORGE

We'll take care of that.

YOUNG JACK

But I, I don't even have-

FOOT AND A HALF GEORGE

You'll send it back when you feel able.

YOUNG JACK

Gee thanks. Thank you for everything-

FOOT AND A HALF GEORGE

Don't mention it.

THE SANCTIMONIOUS KID

Kid, that's what comes of be in' on the square. If you'd burnt Smiler, you'd have been here just the same and you'd have got a beatin' instead of a lawyer and a lot of good advice from real people.

FOOT AND A HALF GEORGE

We'll be gettin out soon enough. Heading out to San Francisco. We could use a kid like you. I'll send for Judge Powers in the morning.

YOUNG JACK

I don't what to say.

SOLDIER JOHNNIE

Don't say nothin...

FOOT AND A HALF GEORGE

A YEGG CAN BUY A JUDGE

THE SANCTIMONIOUS KID

A JUDGE CAN DO THE REST

SOLDIER JOHNNIE

THE JOHNSONS RUN THIS PRISON YARD

ALL THREE

NOW YOU'RE WITH THE BEST  
NOW YOU'RE WITH THE BEST

Act 2 Scene 3

Young Jack, George, Sanc, and Johnnie  
stand on the streets of San Francisco. All  
around people come and go.

FOOT AND A HALF GEORGE

See that bank across the street here- You're gonna go in and rent a safety box for a year  
– it's about four dollars. Arrange with them to let anyone into it that brings a key. When  
you get the receipt for the box rent tear it up, throw the pieces away, and bring me the  
keys.

Sanc snatches the money out of Jack's hands  
and hands him coins.

THE SANCTIMONIOUS KID

Nobody likes paper. They're not used to it yet. People don't know the good paper from  
the bad and they'll call the coppers just to inspect it.

FOOT AND A HALF GEORGE

You can go in two or more times a day and watch people. Many women have all their  
jewelry in safety boxes and only take it out when they want to display it at a theater or  
party. They lift it on the afternoon of the evening they want to wear it, and put it back the  
next morning, but they have to keep it at home that night. Simplest thing in the world to  
tail them home from the bank.

(to Sanc)

Get the kid some decent clothes.

George and Johnnie head off.

*Shift.*

A Tailor fits Young Jack for a gray suit.

THE SANCTIMONIOUS KID

What the hell is that?

YOUNG JACK

Isn't it great? I'm going to have a fine leather trunk as well.

THE SANCTIMONIOUS KID

If you dress yourself like that kid, we part ways today.

YOUNG JACK

What?

Sanc drags Young Jack away from the tailor.

THE SANCTIMONIOUS KID

Where did you gather that insane notion? A gray suit, gray hat, leather trunk!

YOUNG JACK

I've always wanted-

THE SANCTIMONIOUS KID

I suppose you'd have stickers on the trunk so the coppers wouldn't have to ask you where you were from.

YOUNG JACK

Oh.

THE SANCTIMONIOUS KID

Do you want everybody to look at you? Do you want everybody that looks at you to remember you? You do not. Much of what we do depends largely on the element of surprise. People may get a fleeting, frightened glance, and you are off. But a red tie, kid, a glance is enough, and no matter how surprised your party may be he remembers your gray suit, gray hat, or red tie.

Jack motions to the tailor.

JACK

What have you got in brown?

THE SANCTIMONIOUS KID

That's better. You know that old maxim, 'eternal vigilance.' You'll have enough trouble come to you naturally and unavoidably – accidents that you cannot foresee – without advertising for it with a loud suit of rags. Ninety-nine men out of a hundred are picked up through some peculiarity of dress and identified by the same.

JACK

Can I at least have a gun?

THE SANCTIMONIOUS KID

Talk to Johnnie.

*Shift.*

Johnnie examines guns in a small pawnshop.  
Young Jack waits.

YOUNG JACK

That looks like a good one.

SOLDIER JOHNNIE

I've been carrying a gun around for ten years.

YOUNG JACK

I've never had one.

SOLDIER JOHNNIE

Every time I fired it I was in the wrong, legally speaking, see?

YOUNG JACK

Which one am I gonna get?

SOLDIER JOHNNIE

None!

Johnnie tosses down the gun and starts to head out. Young Jack follows.

SOLDIER JOHNNIE

This store has the number of every gun. They put a mark on it for future reference. Your hockshop man is the hangman's handmaiden.

Young Jack feels his throat nervously.

*Shift.*

George sits across from Young Jack in a diner reading a newspaper. Sanc and Johnnie sit at another booth. George passes a piece of paper over to Jack.

FOOT AND A HALF GEORGE

Here's some work for you, kid. There are the names and addresses of about fifty people here and in Oakland who carry burglary insurance. Tells you they have valuables because they are insured, and it tells me that they are careless because they are insured.

SOLDIER JOHNNIE

Also tells us that in case of a showdown they will give up their valuables without a murmur because their insurance.

FOOT AND A HALF GEORGE

Go look over some of those shacks. I want to know about dogs, kids, servants, sick people – everything. The house, the porch, the basement, the yard, the alley.



THE SANCTIMONIOUS KID

You've read a lot of books about criminals, but forget it all. Don't scrape acquaintance with the local girls to ask questions.

FOOT AND A HALF GEORGE

Just walk by and look, or get a book or paper and read where you have a good view of the house and its occupants.

THE SANCTIMONIOUS KID

Look at the porches especially. This is about the time of the year for a good 'supper sneak'; it's dark when they are at dinner now.

FOOT AND A HALF GEORGE

If you see one that looks tough, forget it. There ought to be a few soft ones on that list.

SOLDIER JOHNNIE

One good one would do.

Eagerly, Young Jack starts to head out.

FOOT AND A HALF GEORGE

Hold on now.

Young Jack waits.

FOOT AND A HALF GEORGE cont.

This spot looks promising.

George spreads the paper on the table. The others come over to look at the page George has opened to.

Act 2 Scene 4

\*Christmas Music plays softly. Holiday Shoppers fill the streets.

OLD JACK

This is the season of peace on earth and good will to men. Who gives to the poor lends to the Lord, but when I give anything to the poor I am going to have a better motive. However, we are not givers; we are takers, and our taking should be reasoned out rationally. We will reverse this 'giving and lending.' We will rob the rich and discomfit the devil; thereby perhaps, finding favor in the sight of the Lord.

Young Jack and company arrive outside the Diamond Palace – a fancy jewelry store in downtown San Francisco.

Clerks in the diamond palace where black slacks, white button ups and red hats.

Young Jack and Sanc also where black slacks and button ups. They all enter the store and spread out, Young Jack lingers by the door.

George gives a sharp nod and Young Jack and Sanc quickly pull on red caps identical to the clerks. Young Jack lingers by the door, welcoming customers in and scanning the street for cops.

Sanc slips behind a counter and begins showing jewelry to customers.

George and Johnnie peruse the store each carrying parcels.

YOUNG JACK

Good evening, welcome to Diamond Palace.

A clerk approaches George.

CLERK

Can I help you sir?

FOOT AND A HALF GEORGE

Just waiting on the lady. Thanks.

Young Jack nods at George – the others take note. A few moments later two Police Officers enter the store.

Sanc continues to work as a clerk and George and Johnnie do their best to blend.

Another clerk eyes Sanc suspiciously.

Eventually the police exit the store.

Johnnie steps up to Sanc's counter.

THE SANCTIMONIOUS KID

Now here's something, sir.

Sanc lays out a tray of jewels. The suspicious clerk looks on, but George quickly distracts him as Sanc continues laying out expensive items.

FOOT AND A HALF GEORGE

Pardon me.

SUSPICIOUS CLERK

Yes.

FOOT AND A HALF GEORGE

I'd like to see this watch.

SUSPICIOUS CLERK

Which one, sir?

FOOT AND A HALF GEORGE

The uhh, oh which one was it, that one.

SUSPICIOUS CLERK

This one?

FOOT AND A HALF GEORGE

No.

That one?

SUSPICIOUS CLERK

No the one in the back there.

FOOT AND A HALF GEORGE

This?

SUSPICIOUS CLERK

Yes.

FOOT AND A HALF GEORGE

George holds the watch up to his wrist.

Bit small isn't it?

FOOT AND A HALF GEORGE cont.

I can adjust?

SUSPICIOUS CLERK

Could you?

FOOT AND A HALF GEORGE

Absolutely. Just need to add a few links to the band.

SUSPICIOUS CLERK

That would be fantastic.

FOOT AND A HALF GEORGE

Right away, sir.

SUSPICIOUS CLERK

The clerk takes the watch to a back room as Johnnie places his parcel on top of the jewelry. He removes the parcel and the jewelry is gone.

Hugging the parcel tight to his side Johnnie exits the store. Casually, one at a time, George, Sanc and Young Jack slip out as well just as the Suspicious Clerk returns with the watch.

Act 2 Scene 5

In a hotel room the crew looks over their take. San holds up an especially large gem.

THE SANCTIMONIOUS KID

There's a stone that a Jew would kiss and an Infidel adore.

Young Jack looks at Sanc confused.

THE SANCTIMONIOUS KID cont.

Shakespeare, kid.

Sanc tosses it to Young Jack who examines the gem.

YOUNG JACK

Not bad.

Sanc takes a swig of booze and stares at George.

FOOT AND A HALF GEORGE

Can I help you Sanc?

THE SANCTIMONIOUS KID

If you were to put a dime on the top of George's head and start it sliding down the back it would fall inside his shirt collar. And- and if you started it down his forehead it would wind up in his mouth, his lower jaw sticks out so far.

FOOT AND A HALF GEORGE

Fascinating stuff. Hey Jack.

YOUNG JACK

Yes.

FOOT AND A HALF GEORGE

C'mere.

YOUNG JACK

Yes?

FOOT AND A HALF GEORGE

We talked that over and decided you're entitled to an even cut. We're clean so far as the coppers are concerned.

YOUNG JACK

I doubt if I earned it. I took no chances. You guys did all the work.

FOOT AND A HALF GEORGE

That's true, but here's the main reason we're giving you a cut of the coin...we know you're 'right.' If anything had gone wrong with this caper and we had to take a pinch, we figured you would have been a big help on the outside. That's why you are declared 'in and in' with the works.

YOUNG JACK

I don't know what to say.

JOHNNIE

*Don't say nothing.*

George places the suits on the chair beside Jack.

FOOT AND A HALF GEORGE

Wrap up these suits and throw em away along with the shirts and ties. We head to Mary's in the morning.

YOUNG JACK

Yes, sir.

Young Jack does as he's told.

Old Jack appears.

OLD JACK

With that I became part of the Johnson family. Bums and thieves from the four points of the compass called themselves Johnsons because there were too many to name. A Johnson paid his debts and kept his word. He minded his own business, but would give help when help was needed and asked for. He did not hold out on his confederates or cheat his landlady. He is what they call in show business "good people."

Act 2 Scene 6

George knocks on Mary's door. She answers,

SALT CHUNK MARY

Hey Georgie!

Mary and George hug.

FOOT AND A HALF GEORGE

Got some stuff for you to look at.

SALT CHUNK MARY

I bet you do.

(to the others)

I have a pot of beans on the stove and a fine chunk of salt pork in em. Help yourself.

George and Mary head off.

Jack and the others help themselves to food.

THE SANCTIMONIOUS KID

(to Johnnie)

Now that we can layoff for a while, what will you do?

SOLDIER JOHNNIE

First thing, I'ma buy me a pair of 'smoke wagons.' No telling how soon I'll be broke, an if I have a couple of guns I won't be helpless.

THE SANCTIMONIOUS KID

I'm going home for the winter. My old people are both living, and I've got seven brothers and sisters. I bring them all something nice for presents, not that they need anything, but just to rub it into them. I'm the youngest and always had to take the leavings. The first lock I ever busted was on the pantry in the kitchen of my old New Hampshire home.

YOUNG JACK

When will you be going?

THE SANCTIMONIOUS KID

Probably buy a ticket home tomorrow.

JOHNNIE

Sanc, you're not going to start paying fare?

THE SANCTIMONIOUS KID

Yes, I am, that's the funny part of it. My hometown is twenty miles off the railroad and I always have to pay fare on the stage going in and out.

Mary and George return. Mary counts out cash. George passes money out to the others.

THE SANCTIMONIOUS KID

Top dough for you, isn't it, kid?

YOUNG JACK

Yes, this is the most I ever had.

SALT CHUNK MARY

Quite a haul here, Georgie.

FOOT AND A HALF GEORGE

Yeah, I suppose so.

(to Young Jack)

Grabbed a timepiece for ya, kid.

George gives Young Jack a fancy watch.

YOUNG JACK

Oh wow. That's great. I don't know what to-

Soldier Johnnie clears his throat loudly.

YOUNG JACK

Nothin, I got nothin to say.

Satisfied, Johnnie nods.

FOOT AND A HALF GEORGE

Where will you be going, kid?

YOUNG JACK

I'd like to stay with you people, but if you're gonna split out, I dunno.

FOOT AND A HALF GEORGE

I'm going out to the jungle. No New Hampshire winter for me. You can come if you like.

YOUNG JACK

That sounds fine.



FOOT AND A HALF GEORGE

We'll be gettin back on the road soon, Mary.

SALT CHUNK MARY

I'm just happy you're out the big house. Try to keep it that way.

FOOT AND A HALF GEORGE

Will do, Mary. I got me an apprentice now.

SALT CHUNK MARY

I think I've seen the boy around these parts.

FOOT AND A HALF GEORGE

He's a good kid.

Act 2 Scene 7

George and Young Jack say their goodbyes to Sanc and Johnnie. They all head off.

Old Jack appears.

OLD JACK

When a bums' convention is to be held, the jungle is first cleared of all outsiders such as dingbats, whangs, jungle buzzards, and scissor-bills. Conventions are not so popular in these droughty days. Formerly kegs of beer were rolled into the jungle and the punks were sent for mickies. Mulligans were put to cooking on big fires and there was a general boiling up of clothes, shaving and sometimes haircutting. This convention at Pocatello ended in the usual way. Somebody was killed.

*Shift.*

A Bum Convention: men cook, drink, eat, wash, and shave. Old bums sit around expertly mending their clothes. Bums sing, their words slurring together.

BUMS

ON SUNDAY NIGHT  
IT'S MY DELIGHT  
AND PLEASURE DON'T YOU SEE  
MEETING ALL THE YEGGS  
THE CRIPPLED PEGS  
THAT WORK THE ROAD WITH ME

THERE'S FRESH SOUP ON THE FIRE  
THERE'S MEAT STILL ON THE BONE  
AND YOU'RE WELCOME EVERY EVENING  
IF YOU'RE WITHOUT A HOME

DEEP IN THE FOREST JUNGLE  
WE GATHER FAR AND WIDE  
BRASS PEDDLERS COME SWAP STORIES  
THE CRIPPLES COME TO HIDE

THE TIRED DROP THEIR WARES HERE  
DEVISE NEW STUNTS FOR SHOW  
AND YOU'RE WELCOME EVERY EVENING  
IF YOU'RE WITHOUT A HOME

George and Jack pass a bottle back and fourth.

FOOT AND A HALF GEORGE

I got this bum foot through buying a roll of rotten fuse at an out-of-the-way general store in Montana. This caper I'm tellin' you about was a third-class 'P.O.' outside of Butte. I had a hole in the old box an 'a shot in it in half an hour. I strung the fuse to a window and touched it off from the outside. It spluttered along the floor and up to the door of the box, but nothing happened. After a few minutes I went back inside to put on a fresh piece of fuse. Just as I got in front of the box there was a roar, the door came off, and knocked me flat. The edge of it caught my foot on the floor and smashed all the toes.

YOUNG JACK

Did you get the coin?

FOOT AND A HALF GEORGE

You're damn right I did. After my wind came back I got the coin and stickers, limped outside where I had an old 'swift' tied to a hitching rack. I had no saddle and it was a tough ride into Silver Bow Junction.

YOUNG JACK

I bet.

FOOT AND A HALF GEORGE

But I got there before daylight and grabbed a rattler into Pocatello where 'Salt Chunk Mary' put me away, got a doctor, and got rid of my 'stickers.' That's why I'm so particular about my fuse-

A mean looking yegg, Gold Tooth, battered and bloody, pushes through the camp.

GOLD TOOTH

*Look at me, this is the rankest deal I've got in my ten years on the road. I go into Salt Chunk Mary's joint and drop a little gold hoop to one of her frowsy little wenches. I'm decent enough to buy her a beer when she goes out for my beer she shows the hoop to Mary.*

Through his drunkenness, George perks up at the mention of Mary. Jack takes notice.

GOLD TOOTH cont.

*Mary comes in and orders me to blow back the wenches nine bucks. I tells her there's nothing doin' and starts for the door. Mary hits me in the back of the head with a bottle of beer, and when I go down she puts the boots to me. That's what I get for bein' a good bum. I'm goin' back up there tonight and burn down her shack; the dirty, big, red-headed Amazonian battle-ax. I'll-*

FOOT AND A HALF GEORGE

Hey you, you're a liar.

Startled, Gold Tooth looks hard at George.

FOOT AND A HALF GEORGE cont.

You was a good bum, but you're dog meat now.

George instantly draws a pistol. Flashes of light accompany the crack of gunfire. Two slugs slam into Gold Tooth, who collapses.

Behind George, a Bum pulls a knife.

YOUNG JACK

George! Lookout!

George turns just as he is stabbed. George Groans and shoves the bum into the bonfire.

Chaos reigns as the convention rushes to disperse. Jack helps George off into the night.

Act 2 Scene 8

In a rattling freight car, Young Jack tries to nurse George's wounds.

FOOT AND A HALF GEORGE

That was foolish of me.

YOUNG JACK

It couldn't be helped.

FOOT AND A HALF GEORGE

Maybe you're right.

YOUNG JACK

Sure I am.

FOOT AND A HALF GEORGE

Still, that kinda mess, has a way of catching up with ya.

YOUNG JACK

We got away from it.

FOOT AND A HALF GEORGE

You never know. A couple of those bums could go into the Salvation Army years from now, get religion and hang me.

YOUNG JACK

Oh they were full a 'hall. What'll those bindlestiffs know about it come tomorrow?

FOOT AND A HALF GEORGE

You probably think I croaked him to cut some crazy caper.

YOUNG JACK

I don't think that.

FOOT AND A HALF GEORGE

HE WAS SLANDERIN THE BEST WOMAN I KNOW  
MARY'S RIGHTER THAN APRIL RAIN

YOUNG JACK

Sure she is.

FOOT AND A HALF GEORGE  
IF YOU KNEW HALF WHAT I KNOW OF MARY  
YOU'D HAVE DONE THE SAME

I AIN'T LOOKIN FOR A CHANCE TO KILL  
HAD ENOUGH A THAT IN THE WAR  
DEAD MEN DO TELL TALES  
THEY'LL HUNT YOU ALL THE MORE

BURGLARS ARE SOON FORGOT  
BUT WHEN YOU LEAVE A CORPSE BEHIND  
THEY'VE GOT THE BALANCE OF YOUR LIFE TO CATCH YOU  
SOON YOU'RE NOOSE IS TWINED

George groans in pain.

YOUNG JACK

Why don't you rest, George.

George looks down to the gun in his lap.

FOOT AND A HALF GEORGE  
YOU'RE ONLY AT THE BEGINNING MY BOY  
REMEMBER A GUN CAN BE YOUR FRIEND  
BUT IF THE FIRE BECOMES YOUR MASTER  
THAT WILL BE YOUR END

George gives Jack his gun and his cash.

FOOT AND A HALF GEORGE  
CARRY THIS HEAD OF CABBAGE  
CLOSE TO YOUR CHEST  
SWITCH TRAINS UP AHEAD  
YOU'RE ONE OF THE BEST

George lies down and dies.

YOUNG JACK

George? George? Hey George? George!

Young Jack cradles George and rocks back  
and forth.

Old Jack appears.

### OLD JACK

I marvel to this day I did not quit my stealing right then and there. If I had had brains enough to grease a griddle, I would have taken that money gone off somewhere, got a job, and tried to do the right thing by myself and others. Yet the thought of turning to the right, squaring myself, and starting anew never entered my mind. Probably youthful egotism, which is nothing but confidence born of ignorance, whispered to me that I could beat a game I knew to be wrong and full of dangers. I went against it alone and money was plentiful for the time.

Act 2 Scene 9

OLD JACK

Summer came and the memorable World's Fair. I saw it all, but it put an awful dent in my bankroll and winter was coming. I heard wonderful tales of New York City and its opportunities and had almost made up my mind to go there for the winter when I met an intelligent young chap who knew all about it. He advised me to-

INTELLIGENT CHAP

STAY AWAY FROM NEW YORK  
IT'S THE TOUGHEST TOWN IN THE NATION  
IF YOU ARE AN OUTSIDER  
NEW YORK AIN'T NO VACATION

ALL

STAY AWAY FROM NEW YORK  
IT'S THE TOUGHEST TOWN IN THE NATION  
IF YOU ARE AN OUTSIDER  
NEW YORK AIN'T NO VACATION

IF YOU WISE UP TO THE COPS  
AND FIND YOUR WAY IN THE STREET  
YOU'RE GONNA BE IN FOR A SHOCK  
YOU'VE STILL GOT THE GANGS TO BEAT

STAY AWAY FROM NEW YORK  
IT'S THE TOUGHEST TOWN IN THE NATION  
IF YOU ARE AN OUTSIDER  
NEW YORK AIN'T NO VACATION

THE THIEVES ARE ALL IN GANGS THERE  
THE IRISH THE DAGOES THE JEWS  
THEY ALL FIGHT EACH OTHER

INTELLIGENT CHAP

BUT THEY'LL COME TOGETHER AGAINST YOU'S

ALL

SO STAY AWAY FROM NEW YORK  
IT'S THE TOUGHEST TOWN IN THE NATION  
IF YOU ARE AN OUTSIDER  
NEW YORK AIN'T NO VACATION

THEY'LL SPOT YOUR HAT AND SOFT TALK  
THEY'LL SNITCH YOU OUT TO THE COPS



INTELLIGENT CHAP

I COULDN'T GET A DIME IN NEW YORK  
OUT WEST I'M MAKIN DOLLARS  
IN NEW YORK I'M IN GRADE SCHOOL  
OUT WEST I AM TOP SCHOLAR

ALL

SO STAY AWAY FROM NEW YORK  
IT'S THE TOUGHEST TOWN IN THE NATION  
IF YOU ARE AN OUTSIDER  
NEW YORK AIN'T NO VACATION

STAY AWAY FROM NEW YORK  
IT'S THE TOUGHEST TOWN IN THE NATION  
IF YOU ARE AN OUTSIDER  
NEW YORK AIN'T  
NEW YORK AIN'T  
NEW YORK AIN'T

INTELLIGENT CHAP

WHERE YOU WANT TO GO

OLD JACK

I went to Chicago instead.

Act 2 Scene 10

A parlor in Chicago. Lowlifes lurk about.  
Men sit at the bar talking to woman.  
Working Women hover about looking for  
company. Julia is among these women.

A Jazz Woman stands by a piano singing.

JAZZ WOMAN

THIS LITTLE PIGGY WENT TO MARKED  
THIS LITTLE PIGGY STAYED HOME  
THIS LITTLE PIGGY HAD ROAST BEEF  
THIS LITTLE PIGGY HAD NONE  
NOW I RECALL MY DEAR OLD MOTHER  
PUTTING ME TO BED  
SHE TUCKED ME IN AND SAID  
TO HER LITTLE SLEEPY HEAD

Young Jack enters the place and assesses the  
crowd. He sits alone at a corner table.

JAZZ WOMAN cont.

THIS LITTLE PIGGY  
WAS A BAD LITTLE PIGGY  
WHO CRIED ALL THE WAY HOME  
YEARS HAVE PASSED  
BUT IT'S STILL MY FAVORITE SONG

I DREAM AND PRAY SOMEDAY I'LL SAY  
TO A CUTE LITTLE PIGGY OF MY OWN  
THIS LITTLE WENT TO MARKET  
THIS LITTLE STAYED HOME

Young Jack spots Julia and makes his way  
over to her.

YOUNG JACK

Hey Julia.

She turns to face him.

JULIA

.....Hey, kid.

Not a kid anymore. YOUNG JACK

No, I see you're not. JULIA

How you been? YOUNG JACK

Been better. JULIA

Yeah? YOUNG JACK

Well what about you? JULIA

Me? YOUNG JACK

What of it? Looks like you made out just fine. JULIA

Yeah, sure. Today I'm gettin by. YOUNG JACK

And tomorrow? JULIA

Can't say, now can I? YOUNG JACK

Just look at you. JULIA

What? YOUNG JACK

You were the sweetest kid I ever knew, you know that? JULIA

Was I? YOUNG JACK

You sure were.	JULIA
I waited for you, Julia.	YOUNG JACK
Oh, I hope you didn't stay sore about all that.	JULIA
Can't say that I did.	YOUNG JACK
I'm glad.	JULIA
But seeing you here, now...	YOUNG JACK
Yeah?	JULIA
Say, you wanna get outa here?	YOUNG JACK
Business or pleasure, Mr. Jack?	JULIA

Act 2 Scene 11

In a dark hotel room bed, Young Jack and Julia tear each other's clothes off.

Later, Julia heads back out into the night.

YOUNG JACK

Am I gonna see you again.

JULIA

I would hope so.

Young Jack watches her go.

*Shift.*

Later, there is a loud knock on the door.  
Young Jack's eyes open. Three more bangs on the door. Young Jack rises and heads to the door.

YOUNG JACK

Who's there?

JULIA O.S.

It's me.

Young Jack unlocks and opens the door.  
Julia rushes in and he closes the door behind her.

JULIA cont.

You must help me.

YOUNG JACK

What is it?

JULIA

A man is dead in my room. If he is found there the police - you know - they'll say it's murder.

Young Jack dresses quickly and follows Julia into the night.

*Shift.*

Julia's place. Julia paces nervously. Young Jack enters.

JULIA

Where did you leave it?

YOUNG JACK

Up the alley.

JULIA

Thank you.

YOUNG JACK

If you've got any of that guy's junk around here you'd better ditch it. They will find him in the morning, and every crib in the block might be searched.

JULIA

No, no, I didn't touch him. I picked him up on the street. When we came in here he stretched out across the bed and went to sleep. I took my hat and coat off and tried to wake him, but couldn't. After a while his hands turned cold and I saw he was dead. Then I went for you.

YOUNG JACK

What'd you give him?

JULIA

What I give him?

YOUNG JACK

A little chloral in his whisky-

JULIA

Jack-

YOUNG JACK

So you could go through his pockets while he slept?

JULIA

I already told you-

YOUNG JACK

I know what you told me.

JULIA

I appreciate you helping me.

Julia moves to Young Jack, but he shakes her off.

YOUNG JACK

I have no stomach for this business.

JULIA

You have a problem with how I make a living?

YOUNG JACK

Yeah, actually I do.

JULIA

(indignant)

Really, Jack.

YOUNG JACK

That's the way I feel about it.

JULIA

You're a thief!

YOUNG JACK

(keep your voice down)

I know what I am.

JULIA

And what's the difference?

YOUNG JACK

Difference is there's body in that ally.

JULIA

Where are you going?

YOUNG JACK

I can't stay in here. As much as I would like to.

JULIA

Would you like to?

DON'T GO

I WAITED	YOUNG JACK
DON'T GO	JULIA
YOU NEVER CAME	YOUNG JACK
STAY NOW	JULIA
IT'S TOO LATE	YOUNG JACK
STAY NOW	JULA
NOT AGAIN	YOUNG JACK
I GOT SCARED <u>U</u>	JULIA
I LEFT HOME	YOUNG JACK
I WAS YOUNG	JULIA
ALL ALONE	YOUNG JACK
WHAT CAN I SAY WHAT CAN I DO I'D LIKE YOU HERE TO START ANEW DON'T GO	JULIA
I WAITED	YOUNG JACK
DON'T GO	JULIA



YOU NEVER CAME	YOUNG JACK
STAY NOW	JULIA
IT'S TOO LATE	YOUNG JACK
STAY NOW	JULA
NOT AGAIN	YOUNG JACK
PLEASE JACK	JULIA
NICE TO SEE YOU	YOUNG JACK
PLEASE JACK	JULIA
I'LL BE GOIN	YOUNG JACK
PLEASE JACK	JULIA
GET SOME REST NOW	YOUNG JACK
TAKE ME WITH YOU	JULIA
I can't do that.	YOUNG JACK
DON'T GO	JULIA
I WAITED	YOUNG JACK

DON'T GO  
WE MADE PLANS  
STAY NOW  
NOW IT'S TOO LATE  
STAY NOW  
NOW THERE'S NO CHANCE  
NO CHANCE

JULIA  
YOUNG JACK  
JULIA  
YOUNG JACK  
JULA  
YOUNG JACK  
BOTH

Julia won't let go. They embrace.

Just for the night.

JULIA

Young Jack relents.

OLD JACK  
Against my better judgment, I stayed with her. Sure enough, they came for me in the morning.

The room is raided by police. Young Jack is arrested. He looks at Julia one last time as he is hauled off.

OLD JACK cont.  
That was the last I saw of Julia. She soon fell to the background of my memory.  
(beat)  
A dead body in Chicago didn't mean much. I was extradited back to California.

Act 2 Scene 12

Young Jack sits in his cell. Heavy footsteps approach.

OLD JACK

Richard Murphy, or "Dirty Dick" as the "cons" called him, was captain of Folsom at that time. He was feared and hated from one end of the country to the other. I doubt if a more bloodthirsty jailer ever flourished anywhere. He was repeatedly brought before the commission for his cruelty to unfortunates falling into his hands, but for years mustered enough influence to hold his job, which he kept until women got the right to vote and demanded his removal.

Dirty Dick and two other Guards arrive and unlock Young Jack's cell.

DIRTY DICK

You better tell me all about that robbery.

YOUNG JACK

Can't say I know what you're referring to.

Dick throws Young Jack to the floor and begins to beat on him.

DIRTY DICK

Get the jacket!

Young Jack is forced to his feet and strapped into a straight jacket. He is tied in tight and beaten some more.

Young Jack rolls about in agony. In other cells, men in straight jackets also roll about on the floor groaning in pain.

OLD JACK

The strait-jacket was to the prison warden what his rope was to the Vigilante, what the New York Commissioner would make of the nightstick – a short-cut. The jacket had a brief reign and a swift and violent end. So far as I know, every man who was subjected to its ferocious punishment was so hopelessly maimed that he was a derelict for life, or so twisted mentally that he became a homicidal maniac.

*Shift.*

Young Jack is released from prison. A  
crazy grimace has formed on his face.

#### OLD JACK

When I left prison, I vowed never to make another friend or do another decent thing. I went about the country for months with but one thing in my mind, a sort of vicious hatred of everybody and everything. In the midst of plenty I found myself starving, and turned to the more direct business of highway robbery.

Act 2 Scene 13

Golden Gate Park.

Young Jack follows two men into a tree-covered area. Jack draws his pistol and cuts them off.

YOUNG JACK

Wallets and watches, gentlemen.

ASSOCIATE

(shocked)

Oh my.

FREMONT OLDER

(reassuring)

It's alright.

Fremont looks to Young Jack and nods respectfully.

FREMONT OLDER cont.

Very well.

Fremont digs in his pockets, and his associate does the same. A Young Police Officer appears behind Jack.

YOUNG OFFICER

(drawing his gun)

Freeze!

Young Jack slowly turns to face the officer.

YOUNG OFFICER cont.

Freeze right there!

Young Jack does so. The young officer approaches Young Jack.

YOUNG OFFICER cont.

Drop it.

Young Jack glances about him. On all sides more Officers are closing in.

Young Jack drops his weapon and braces himself. Crack! The young officer pistol-whips Jack to the ground as he kicks his gun away. More officers rush in and beat Jack down. Fremont Older steps forward.

FREMONT OLDER

Here now! I say he's had enough of that!

MEAN OFFICER

You have any idea who we're dealing with here, Mr. Older?

FREMONT OLDER

That's enough!!

The officers lift Young Jack to his feet. Barely conscious, Jack is escorted away. Fremont Older watches him dragged off.

*Shift.*

A jail cell door slams shut.

In a small cell, his mind and body taxed to the brink of living, Young Jack lies on a hard wooden bench cupping his swollen and bloody head in his hands. Old Jack appears.

OLD JACK

The more a prisoner is questioned the less they know, the less he is questioned the more they know. My captors asked me no questions.

Young Jack smirks, then begins chuckling to himself. Completely exhausted, Young Jack's eyes tear up and his laugh turns to uncontrollable sobs.

Act 2 Scene 14

In a courtroom, still visibly bruised, Young Jack sits at the defendant's table listening to his charges. The Prosecutor lays into him.

PROSECUTOR

Men such as this your honor are emblematic of new breed of criminal.

Court Spectators nearly fill the benches. Among them, Fremont Older looks on. A Newspaper Reporter takes notice of Mr. Older and jots something down.

PROSECUTOR cont.

Greedy beyond limitation, savage beyond remorse, devoid of any and all moral imperatives. What are we left to do with such vile and venomous cancers on society?

YOUNG JACK

Excuse me- Have we met?

PROSECUTOR

I'm sorry-

Young Jack struggles to his feet. Jack's Lawyer looks shocked as does the rest of the courtroom.

YOUNG JACK

You seem to know an awful lot about me-

The Judge bangs his gavel.

JUDGE

You're out of order!

YOUNG JACK

My apologies Your Honor. Just thought-

JUDGE

You will be seated.

Young Jack looks from the judge to the prosecutor, then returns to his seat.

YOUNG JACK

I spoke out of line, Your Honor.

JUDGE

(to the prosecutor)

You may proceed.

The prosecutor looks up, completely thrown off by the interruption.

PROSECUTOR

Uhh... That's all for now, Your Honor.

YOUNG JACK

May I make a statement?

JUDGE

(losing patience)

This is the last time.

The judge gestures for Young Jack to take the floor.  
He returns to his feet.

YOUNG JACK

I AM A CRIMINAL  
I'VE SAT IN NUMEROUS JAILS  
I'VE BEEN TAUGHT THE LESSON OF CREULTY  
BUT CRUELTY ALWAYS FAILS

IF YOU PUT A BOY IN PRISON  
AT THE AGE I WAS FIRST PUT IN  
HE'S GOT NO CHANCE TO ESCAPE  
THE HABIT OF CRIME WILL BEGIN

YOU'RE TRYING TO OUT GANG THE GANGSTER  
TO OUT-SHOOT THE SHOOTER YOU SEE  
I DON'T KNOW A SINGLE PERSON  
REFORMED BY BRUTALITY

BUT I KNOW    YOU CANT WIN  
WITH THIS LIFE    WITH THIS LIFE  
I KNOW    YOU CANT WIN  
WITH THIS LIFE    WITH THIS LIFE



YOUNG JACK cont.

I HUNTED – BECAUSE I WAS HUNTED  
SHOWED COMPASSION TO NO ONE  
YOU’VE TAUGHT ME ABOUT KINDNESS YOUR HONOR  
AND I’M CERTAIN THAT I’LL RECEIVE NONE

IF YOU PAID A BIT MORE ATTENTION  
TO THE HIGHCHAIR AND THE CHILD  
YOU COULD LOSE YOUR BOOTS AND HAND CUFFS  
KEEP CHILDREN FROM RUNNING WILD

‘CUS I KNOW YOU CANT WIN  
WITH THIS LIFE WITH THIS LIFE  
YES I KNOW YOU CANT WIN  
WITH THIS LIFE WITH THIS LIFE

BEATING AFTER BRUTAL BEATING  
THREE DAYS ON A DUNGEON FLOOR  
THE STRAIT JACKET IN FOLSOM PRISON  
I COULDN’T TAKE ANYMORE

SO MUCH LAW AT THE END OF A NIGHT STICK  
SO MUCH LAW AT THE END OF A NOOSE  
VIOLENCE BEGETS VIOLENCE  
NO OTHER PATH TO CHOOSE

I KNOW  
YOU CANT WIN  
WITH THIS LIFE  
WITH THIS LIFE

YES I KNOW  
YOU CANT WIN  
WITH THIS LIFE  
WITH THIS LIFE

YOU CAN’T WIN  
YOU CAN’T WIN  
YOU CAN’T WIN  
YOU CAN’T WIN...

Young Jack’s words hang in the air. He remains standing, out of breath and shocked by his own statements. The court is again silent. Fremont Older stares at Young Jack.

*Shift*

Back in his cell, eyes closed, Jack sits on the floor leaned against the cement wall. A Guard approaches Young Jack's cell.

GUARD

Got a visitor.

Young Jack looks up at the guard, confused. Fremont Older enters Jack's cell. Young Jack motions to the hard wooden bench across from him and Mr. Older takes a seat.

Older lights up a cigarette and offers the pack to Young Jack. Young Jack gently refuses.

FREMONT OLDER

You've got a lot to say, Mr. Black.

YOUNG JACK

Never really said much before.

FREMONT OLDER

Said a whole lot today in that courtroom.

YOUNG JACK

I don't even know what I was saying.

FREMONT OLDER

On the contrary, I think you quite well what you were saying. I think a lot of people need to hear what you said today.

Jack nods solemnly.

FREMONT OLDER cont.

Jack- do you know who I am?

Young Jack looks at Fremont Older, unsure.

FREMONT OLDER cont.

My name is Fremont Older. I write for a newspaper. I'd like to write about you. And if you would allow it, I'd like to help you.

YOUNG JACK

I'm afraid you'd be wasting a lot of valuable time if you tried to do anything for me.

FREMONT OLDER

Why do you say that?

YOUNG JACK

I'm facing twenty-five years. I'm guilty. I'm plastered over with prior convictions.

FREMONT OLDER

Anything else I should know?

YOUNG JACK

The police hate me, the jailers dislike me because I tried to escape, and the trial judge is sore because I've done everything possible to obstruct the judgment.

FREMONT OLDER

Did you mean what you said in court today?

YOUNG JACK

I'm tired of stealing and tired of living.

FREMONT OLDER

Are you willing to try something else?

YOUNG JACK

There's only one thing I can say for myself. I've never broken my word. If you can help me, I give you my word to quit stealing.

FREMONT OLDER

That's all I need.

YOUNG JACK

Well you have it.

Act 2 Scene 15

OLD JACK

I'm not finding fault with these brave days of jungle music, synthetic liquor, and dimple-kneed maids, and anybody that thinks the world is going to the bow wows because of them ought to think back to San Francisco or any other big city, to the days when there were saloons by the thousand, gambling unrestricted, cribs by the mile and hop joints by the score. I knew where they were then, and with plenty of money and leisure I did them all. These things may exist now, but if they do, I don't know where.

Old Jack puts on a gray coat. Now wearing a gray suit he takes a seat at a desk and puts on some reading glasses.

*Shift.*

We are now in a library.

OLD JACK cont.

I am now a librarian. Do I look like one?

A Young Woman approaches Jack's desk, but pauses as she looks Old Jack over.

OLD JACK cont.

I do not scowl, I do not sneer; yet there is something in my face that causes a man or woman to hesitate before asking to be directed to the card catalog.

The Young Woman smiles nervously at Old Jack. He rises and helps the woman with the card catalog.

*Shift.*

Old Jack somberly packs up for the day. He straightens out his desk and puts on his jacket.

Old Jack waves to the security guard as he exits the library.

OLD JACK

Goodnight, Frank.

SECURITY GUARD

Goodnight, Jack.

*Shift.*

Old Jack heads up the block A Young  
Tough eyes Old Jack.

The youngster nods to his Partner and the  
two begin to follow Jack.

Old Jack turns down an empty side street.  
The young tough pulls a gun from his jacket.

YOUNG TOUGH

Put up your hands.

Old Jack does so.

YOUNG TOUGH cont.

Turn your face to that fence.

The young tough steps behind Jack and  
pushes his gun hard into Old Jack's back

OLD JACK

(slowly, looking at the partner)

All right, brother. It's all yours. It's in my left-hand pants pocket.

The tough reaches into Old Jack's pocket  
and removes his money.

OLD JACK cont.

I've got a watch that's worth a lot to me; I wish you'd let me keep it. It might bring you  
four dollars, but it might also bring you forty years.

YOUNG TOUGH

You keep your face to that fence til we get out of the block, you hear?

Old Jack lock eyes with the kid- crack! A  
single shot slams into Jack's gut. The  
Tough runs off. Old Jack lays bleeding on  
the concrete.

Act 2 Scene 16

Old Jack lays in a hospital bed recovering from the shooting.

A Detective and a Policeman drag in the young man who shot Old Jack.

DETECTIVE

Mr. Black, is this the man who robbed and shot you?

Old Jack takes a pained breath and sits up. With great effort, he stands and walks over to the youngster.

Old Jack looks his shooter over. Without a word, Old Jack punches him in the face and the young man drops to the ground.

OLD JACK

I've never seen this boy before in my life.

The young man is led away in handcuffs as Old Jack walks down stage.

OLD JACK cont.

I am sure of but one thing - I failed as a thief, and at that I am luckier than most. I quit with my health and my liberty. Half my thirty years in the underworld was spent in prison. What chance have you now? I would ask any young man, with shotgun squads and crime crushers cruising the highways and byways, and then consider the accidents and snitches and ask yourself, what chance have you got out there in the streets?

HAD I LIVED MY LIFE  
WORKED AND PLANNED AND SAVED  
I MIGHT HAVE A HOME OR FAMILY  
THOSE THINGS YOU PEOPLE CRAVE

NO NEED FOR RICHES  
I'VE HAD MY FILL  
I FINALLY HAVE MY OWN GRAY SUIT  
WORKED HARD TO PAY THE BILL

I HAVE AS MANY FRIENDS AS I NEED  
NEVER TOOK A WIFE  
I RARELY SAW A WOMAN SMILE  
SPENT MANY LONELY NIGHTS

OLD JACK cont.

I CHOSE THE OPEN ROAD  
LEARNED LESSONS ON THE WAY  
ONE MAN SHOWED ME COMPASSION  
THAT'S WHY I'M HERE TODAY

SO IF YOU LEAVE WITH ANYTHING  
PLEASE LET IT BE THIS REVELATION  
AN ACT KINDNESS CAN SAVE A LIFE  
I'M PROOF OF THIS SIMPLE EQUATION

WE WERE ALL CHILDREN AT ONE TIME  
NO CHILD IS BORN BAD  
THIS MUCH I KNOW FOR CERTAIN  
DESPITE THE LIFE I NEVER HAD

Young Jack is revealed. He sits out front of the Hotel in Kansas City. Young Jack gazes at Old Jack, now the Man in the Gray Suit, in wonderment.

OLD JACK cont.

WHEN I WAS STILL A BOY  
SO YOUNG AND UNAFRAID  
I YEARNED FOR GREAT ADVENTURE  
I DREAMED OF BETTER DAYS

WHEN I WAS STILL A BOY

YOUNG JACK

YOU CAN'T WIN

OLD JACK

SO YOUNG AND UNAFRAID

YOUNG JACK

YOU CAN'T WIN

OLD JACK

I YEARNED FOR GREAT ADVENTURES

YOUNG JACK

YOU CAN'T WIN

OLD JACK

I DREAMED OF BETTER DAYS

DEAR BOY JUST KEEP ON YEARNING  
KEEP WAITING FOR LIFE TO BEGIN  
JUST LAY ABOUT AND DREAM  
FORGET THAT...

YOUNG JACK and OLD JACK

YOU CAN'T WIN

Young Jack stares out and dreams of  
adventure.

Lights fade to black.

END OF PLAY